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**Territorial Identities and Religion in Czechia and Central Europe**

**Územní identity a náboženství v Česku a střední Evropě**

Doctoral thesis

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**Prohlášení:**

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Woods Cross, Utah, USA, 30. 4. 2018

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## Abstract:

Territorial identities are a mosaic of many different cultural elements, from which religion is just one subset. This dissertation explores elements of religion as they are expressed within territorial identities at varying scale levels in Czechia and several neighboring countries. The use of a religiously themed postage stamp or a Christian toponym, the inclusion of a religious site in a hand drawn map of one's hometown or one's position regarding the return of disputed properties to the churches they were taken from years ago, each of these can be an expression of territorial identity. Whether actively practiced or passively acknowledged, religion is bound up in our sense of place. The four separate studies that make up the body of this dissertation present religion's case as an integral ingredient within the territorial identities of Central Europe.

In terms of spatial differences, Slovakia and Poland are more likely, as compared to Czechia, to recognize and include elements of religion in their territorial identities. This is true at both national – postage stamps – and local levels – toponyms and cognitive maps. Each of the methods used to explore the presence of religion in expressions of territorial identity – postage stamps, toponyms and cognitive maps – proved effective. The comparative analyses and case study presented in the article “Secularization and church property: The case of Czechia” also proved effective in shedding light on religion as a component of territorial identities. The recurring dichotomy of passive and active forms of religious identity and their differing impacts on territorial identities becomes apparent when the studies are examined collectively.

## Abstrakt:

Územní identity jsou mosaikou mnoha různých kulturních prvků, z nichž jedním je i náboženství. Tato práce se zaměřuje na náboženství jako na součást územních identit různých měřítek v Česku a ve vybraných sousedních státech. Náboženský prvek jako projev územní identity může nabývat různých podob: použití poštovní známky s náboženským tématem, použití křesťanského toponyma, zařazení náboženského místa do mentální mapy rodného města, ale také vyjádření stanoviska k restituci sporných církevních majetků. Náboženství je nedílně svázané s osobní představou místa bez ohledu na formu (aktivní, pasivní) praktikování náboženství.

Předkládaná práce představuje náboženství jako nedílnou součást územních identit ve střední Evropě na základě čtyř případových studií. Výsledky práce ukazují, že Polsko a Slovensko vykazují větší sklon k uznání a začlenění náboženských prvků do konstrukce územních identit než Česko, což platí jak na národní (poštovní známky), tak na lokální úrovni (toponyma, mentální mapy). Každá z použitých metod (analýza poštovních známek, toponym a mentálních map) se osvědčila při zkoumání náboženských prvků jako nedílné součásti územních identit podobně jako komparativní analýza a případová studie představená v článku „Sekularizace a církevní majetek: případ Česka“. Na základě syntézy poznatků ze všech studií lze identifikovat dichotomii mezi pasivní a aktivní formou náboženské identity jako velmi významný faktor ovlivňující podobu konstrukce územní identity.



# Territorial identities and religion in Czechia and Central Europe

Daniel Reeves

To my wonderful wife Valerie and our children,  
Thanks for your patience and support  
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# Introduction

Humans are inherently social and habitual. We seek out others and organize ourselves into social groups to satisfy a variety of material, social and spiritual needs. The formation and subsequent perpetuation of these social constructions is, however, far from arbitrary. It is closely bound to the inertia of habitus, i.e. traditions, social norms, perceived history, etc. (Elias 1969). The interaction of our inclination to belong, on the one hand, with the traditions and heritage bound up in each social group to which we could potentially belong, on the other, creates an interesting laboratory for an examination of human behavior.

In his structuration theory, Anthony Giddens describes this interaction as the duality of structure (Cloke, Philo and Sadler 1991). Agents act within the bounds of a given structure while those very actions shape the structure of which the agents are a part.

In most cases, we can choose whether and to what degree to affiliate ourselves with various communities. With few exceptions, this is true of religious organizations, political parties, professional associations, interest groups, sports clubs, and myriad other social networks. In contrast, however, certain social groups base *membership* on characteristics that cannot be chosen, including family, nationality, ethnicity, gender, native language, and time and place of birth.

All of these communities, chosen or not, can provide us with identities, which we are then free to use in the pursuit of basic needs and wants. Even more than group membership, group identity is subject to considerable personal (and collective) interpretation. Each community member is free to construct – or allow others to construct – an identity for herself or himself. Over time, thousands and millions of individual decisions, regarding what it means to belong to a given community, continuously form and redefine a collective identity for said community.

*As imagined communities*, in which we do not explicitly choose membership, territorial societies and their associated identities provide a wealth of information concerning who we are and how we perceive ourselves, both individually and collectively (Anderson 2006). These identities vary a great deal over space and time – something that Giddens and other proponents of grand theories have struggled to account for.

This dissertation focuses on identities associated with territorial communities – nation states, regions and local communities – in Czechia and its neighboring Central European states, and on the relationship between these identities and religion. The series of studies examine ways that religion, religious elements and traditions are present in – or absent from – expressions of territorial identity. To a lesser degree, the presented research considers ways that the religious undertones of territorial identities may influence the religious behaviors and identities of those living in or identifying themselves with a given territory.

The studies share a theoretical framework that draws upon structuration theory and its useful conceptualization of the duality of structure (Cloke et al. 1991). In addition, the presented research utilizes concepts from humanistic approaches to geography and from a more recent turn towards realism, as they have been applied in research on religion. This theoretical framework is presented in greater detail below.

Central Europe presents a compelling arena for a study of territorial identities and their religious undertones. Generally, the “conversion” of the various Central European kingdoms to Christianity, beginning in the seventh century, marked a transition from legend and oral tradition to documented history, as perceived and presented by the nations that currently inhabit this space. Consider the heroic and saintly status of Cyril and Methodius, King Wenceslas (Czechia), Stephen I of Hungary, Leopold III (Austria) and other similar historic figures. These leaders are honored and remembered for bringing order and prosperity to areas of Central Europe by converting themselves and others to Christianity.

The organization, education and collective identity that early Christianity provided were vital ingredients in the formation of larger communities, forerunners to the modern nation-states of Central Europe. And yet, while religion and religious tradition play very significant roles in the history and development of Central Europe, we see a great deal of spatial variation – even in this relatively small region – in the way that territorial identities deal with religion today. These range from Poland’s “de-secularization from above” (Lužný and Nešpor 2008, p. 8) and Slovakia’s presentation of the Virgin Mary on both its one hundred and one thousand Koruna banknotes – up until changing to the Euro in 2007 – to increasing religious pluralism, particularly in Germany, and secularization – in Czechia, less than 20% of the population profess a belief in God (European Commission 2005).

With the research presented below, I hope to answer a number of questions concerning religion and territorial identity in Czechia and in Central Europe:

- How is religion expressed in territorial identities at various scale levels and in different countries and regions of Central Europe?
- How do post-Communist communities and their collective identities deal with religious institutions that no longer *speak* to many of their constituents?
- To what degree do religious elements of territorial identities correlate with the religious behavior of local populations?
- How do people perceive the sacred structures that they routinely encounter? How do such perceptions differ from region to region or by nationality?

## Theoretical framework

Structuration theory, developed by Anthony Giddens as an attempt to bridge the gap between structure-centric theories (*structural sociologies*, e.g. Marxism) and agency-centric theories (*interpretive sociologies*, e.g. Humanism), provides a useful framework around which to develop studies of territorial identity (Cloke, et al. 1991, p. 97). Agents identifying themselves with a given structure use their agency to give form and function to the very structure that, in turn, defines certain aspects of their lives and identity. Research must account for this two-way interaction and structuration theory describes an arena, within which this duality can be understood.

Giddens differentiates between *acts* – discrete sequences of action – and *action* – a continuous flow of involvements by different and autonomous human agents. He theorizes that much *action* is, in fact, motivated unconsciously (Cloke et al. 1991, p. 99). “Unconscious motivation is a significant feature of human conduct” (Giddens 1984, p. 6). This unconscious realm plays a critical role in identity formation as well. It is fundamental to the arguments put forth by Anderson (2006) in *Imagined Communities* and Billig (1995) in *Banal Nationalism*. I discuss these in greater detail in the next section.

This notion of “unconscious motivation” is not unique to structuration theory. It appears that Giddens was – in some respects – following in the footsteps of one of his mentors, Norbert Elias. Elias (1969) utilized the concept of *habitus* to describe the way that many of our most commonly made decisions take very little thought, because we simply follow memorized and conditioned routines. Pierre Bourdieu (1990, p. 53) defines habitus as “principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them”. To put it more simply habitus refers “to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences” (Routledge 2016).

Habitus presents a slightly different perspective both on structure – we are socialized into certain ways of thinking and acting – and agents – we tend to act in accordance with the ways we are conditioned and accustomed to respond. This is not to say that everything unfolds in a vacuum of environmental determinism. It is simply a reminder that we all make daily decisions regarding our identities in accordance with, or in opposition to, an ingrained set of preferences or prejudices.

Some geographers have criticized structuration theory for its shortcomings in describing spatial differences and the importance of location (Holmén 1995). In the words of Cloke, Philo and Sadler (1991, p. 18), for example: “Structuration theory ... is perhaps best regarded as a series of warnings about how not to approach human geography rather than as a blueprint for how to do so.”

With these shortcomings in mind, I have elected to utilize certain key elements of structuration theory within what Holmén (1995) calls an *arena approach*. This approach “emphasizes ground level realities and local connections as well as exogenous influences while at the same time providing a testing ground for theories about factors leading to change or stagnation” (Holmén 1995, p. 53). This approach makes it possible to describe and account for both temporal and spatial variability – central components of Hägerstrand’s time geography – as well as the capability, coupling and authority constraints that operate upon them (Pred 1977).

Incorporating religion into studies of social and cultural geography requires some additional theoretical consideration. For several decades, particularly through the 1980s and 1990s, religion was conspicuously absent from the discourse of cultural geography (Dwyer 2016). Dwyer (2016, p. 759) urges researchers to “think flexibly about how to incorporate religious identities into existing frameworks” without simply reducing religion to another category, by which to organize or describe individuals and groups.

Catherine Brace, Adrian Bailey and David Harvey (2006, title) provide a particularly useful “framework for investigating historical geographies of religious identities and communities”. They emphasize the importance of agents’ everyday activities and choices, whereby said agents demonstrate a religious (in this case, Methodist) identity. Significantly, the authors demonstrate a willingness to “move analysis beyond the ‘officially sacred’ and to explore the everyday, informal, and often banal, ...thereby providing a blueprint for how work in the geography of religion may move forward” (Brace, et al. 2006, p. 28).

Approaches based in humanism and realism are particularly useful in enabling researchers to account for and engage with these everyday, informal and banal practices. Humanism in social sciences emerged as a response to the quantitative revolution. It focuses much more on individual agency – the agency-centric theories, mentioned above. Realism seeks to *unpack* knowledge, paving the way for a variety of innovative research methods (Cloke, et. al. 1991). Kamila Klingorová (2017), for example, applies feminist approaches in her research of geographies of religion. She finds that “religion contributes significantly to the formation of the female, everyday experience” (Klingorová 2017, p. iv; translation by author).

## Territorial identities

Just like the regions they represent, territorial identities can exist at a number of different scale levels. I structure this discussion from macro to micro and look first at national identity.

While it is clear that practically all people fit into one nation or another, discussions of national identity sometimes make us uncomfortable. Consider, for example, the ideas of philosopher Johann Herder surrounding the concept of *Volksgeist* or Friedrich Ratzel's *Lebensraum* (Johnson 1995). These ideas are not so surprising when considered within their context, a period of deterministic thought that pervaded the social sciences. Unfortunately, however, Herder's and Ratzel's concepts helped provide a foundation for radical nationalism and abuses to human rights that have been made in the name of nationality or ethnicity. In Europe, these include the atrocities of World War II and, more recently, war crimes committed in the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s and pushback against waves of migration from the Middle East in the 2010s. Whether or not we feel comfortable with the notion of nationalism, however, it does provide us with a territorial identity and forms part of the structure, within which we, as agents, make decisions and construct *action*, in the sense of Giddens's structuration theory.

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (2006) describes the relatively recent rise of the phenomenon of nationalism. He identifies the religious community and the dynastic realm (feudal societies) as the relevant cultural systems that acted as "taken-for-granted frames of reference" before nations, as we know them today, assumed a similar role. This succession coincided with and was greatly aided by the proliferation of printed narratives – especially novels and newspapers – that instilled in their readers a sense of belonging.

Two facets of national identity become clear from this summary of Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. One, that nations and the identities that are associated with them are "taken-



for-granted frames of reference”. In other words, they often work within the unconscious realm of structuration theory, as described by Giddens, or the habitus, as described by Elias and Bourdieu. And two, the observation that printed narratives, over time, instill a sense of belonging – an identity – in readers. The ongoing, narrative discourse describing what it means to belong to a given nation creates meaning both for insiders and outsiders. Those within a nation gain a clearer picture of who they are, collectively, while those without are likewise given messages about how to understand said nationality.

Billig (1995, p. 12) presents a similar thesis with his *Banal Nationalism*, emphasizing the subtle, but powerful reproduction of nations, “an ideology which is so familiar that it hardly seems noticeable”. For most people, national identity quietly simmers in the background, emerging now and then when we feel particularly proud – or ashamed – of our national heritage. Consider, for example, our feelings associated with the Olympics, the World Cup, or news stories that describe our nations’ foreign policy, armed conflicts or quality of life.

One concept of territorial identities that has proven to be a significant factor time and again in the presented research is *othering*, as described by Johnson and Coleman (2012) and Abizadeh (2005) among others. In multiple scenarios, the desire of individuals or groups to be different from *that-other-group-over-there* leads to innovation and/or greater dedication in the reproduction of said individuals’ or groups’ identities. Johnson and Coleman (2012) point out that this *other* can be internal (within the same country) or external (international). Othering can take place at any scale level and can be a factor in national, regional or local identities.

Concepts of region and regional identity are central to human geography. Although the research presented herein focuses primarily on identities at national and local levels, much of our understanding of territorial identities originates from research at the regional level.

Anssi Paasi (1986), for example, built upon concepts from structuration theory and time geography to describe four distinct stages in a process of institutionalization of regions.

Through this process, regions first assume territorial (1) and symbolic shape (2). Eventually they are endowed with institutions (institutional shape – 3) and become established entities within society (4). Paasi makes use of ideas put forth by Allan Pred, who describes place as a process:

“The reproduction of social and cultural forms, the formation of biographies and the transformation of nature ceaselessly become one another at the same time that time-space specific activities and power-relations ceaselessly become one another” (Pred 1984, p. 282).

Understanding place as a process and identity formation as the ongoing reproduction of *institutionalized* regions in the minds of those that care to recognize them is critical to making an effective study of the interplay of religion and territorial identities.

More recently, Czech authors have established Paasi’s work with regions in Czech geography and made some important additions. Pavel Chromý (2003, title) describes the formation of regional identity as a “vital part of geographical research”. In his doctoral thesis, Michal Semian (2016) describes a framework in which three dimensions of region – imagined, experienced and constructed – interact to continuously reproduce a collective regional identity.

My own use of region is one that Semian (2016, p. 12) might criticize: “regions as a mere category, pegged between the local and national level”. However, because the focus of this research is to establish and describe a connection between religion and territorial identities, I use region as an organizational category and engage much more with national and local identities.

Semian (2016, p. 27) also points out “that people usually feel the strongest sense of attachment to areas on local and national level[s]”. My co-authors and I had more success elucidating religious aspects of identity at both the national level (postage stamps) and the local level (children’s maps, toponyms and church-owned property) as opposed to regional levels in between.

Local community identities display greater significance because they are a vital part of everyday life. They connect individuals with places that are routinely – and very frequently – seen, experienced and shared with others. Manifestations of religion at this level speak to the realities of local, daily life.

## Religion

Religion is an often-overlooked component of territorial identities. This is due, in part, to secularization processes and a general sense of separation – ranging from suspicion to hostility – between religion and science. As Henkel (2014, p. 11) points out, “While class, and more recently race and gender, were regarded important features of population groups, ...religion was not taken into account. Even the new cultural geography to a large extent ignored religion as a marker of identity”. Dwyer (2016) also describes the conspicuous absence of religion in studies of cultural geography published in the 1980s and 1990s. This is a very different situation from that of a couple hundred years ago, described by Anderson (2006) in *Imagined Communities*. Before the rise of modern nation-states, religion was a primary source of identity, a “taken-for-granted frame of reference”.

While secularization has long been recognized as a significant social process, it is not the end-all, be-all that Max Weber’s secularization thesis seemed to predict (Matlovič, Vlčková, Matlovičová 2014). While the outward influence of religious institutions is much less than it was 100 years ago, religion continues to play an active role in the individual lives and daily decisions of many people (Wilford 2010). Kong (2010, p. 769) encourages the examination of “spaces of everyday life that may occasionally... be infused and shaped by religious values but which are not overtly nor primarily about religion”. Similarly, Brace, Bailey and Harvey (2006, p. 28) wish to see geographic analysis of religious identity formation “explore the everyday, informal and often banal, practices”.

Recognizing the idea that religion can be a significant component of territorial identities and appreciating the fact that other geographers are anxious to see more research into the subtle influence of *everyday* religion, however, leaves us with a formidable challenge. How does one recognize, describe or quantify religious aspects of the reproduction of regional and national identities? This is likely another reason that religion is often overlooked in studies of

territorial identity. It is difficult to measure and difficult to isolate from other cultural categories.

Wilford (2015, title) discusses some of the methodological challenges facing geographers studying religion, in his words “representing the unrepresentable”. This particular article focuses on spirituality – belief in a Higher Power that is not necessarily confined to traditional, organized religion – however, more general studies in geography of religion face similar difficulties. As mentioned above, Brace, Bailey and Harvey (2006) showcase a methodological framework for exploring historical, religious identities. They demonstrate creativity in their use of narrative texts and printed materials to shed light on ways that Methodism shaped everyday life for many in nineteenth century Cornwall.

The studies that follow examine infrequently studied phenomena and utilize innovative methods to better understand the roles that religion can play in agents’ decisions to define and reproduce their communal identities.

## Central Europe

As stated above, Czechia and surrounding Central European states present a compelling arena for a study of religion and territorial identity. The notion of Central Europe, therefore, merits more discussion and delimitation. Within this research I define Central Europe primarily as territories that were controlled by the large empires of Austria-Hungary and Prussia as well as the smaller kingdoms, duchies and other holdings that existed in the region, before the emergence of modern, nation states. On today's map, I equate this with the states of Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

Other definitions of Central Europe exist. The World Factbook and Encyclopedia Britannica, for example, include Switzerland in addition to the seven countries mentioned above. Other delineations include Croatia, the Baltic States or sections of Romania and Ukraine as part of Central Europe (Murphy, A., Jordan-Bychkov, T., Jordan, B. 2014; van der Poel 2009; Johnson 1995).

Switzerland's tendencies towards isolationism, including its independence from the Holy Roman Empire in 1648 and its centuries-old stance of political neutrality, distance it from the more historically similar states that I consider Central Europe. Only a small portion of Croatia was ever included in the Holy Roman Empire. And while some areas of both Croatia and Romania were included in Austria-Hungary, I view these two countries as peripheral states to the core similar national societies that I choose to identify and study as Central Europe. The studied territories share similar paths of historic development, including the reformation and the rise of Protestantism as well as the perceived cultural threat of the Ottoman Empire to the south and east all against a backdrop of Catholic heritage channeled through the Holy Roman Empire and, more recently, through the Hapsburg rulers of Austria-Hungary.

## Religion in Czechia and Central Europe

And yet, despite this shared history and other cultural similarities, modern indicators of religious belief and practice show great differences. Figure 1 shows the seven states of Central

Europe (as defined above), depicting differences both in the relative numbers of people that profess a belief in God as well as survey respondents' frequency of attendance at religious services. (The statistics that form the basis of this graphic split Germany into West and East, resulting in the appearance of eight separate entities rather than seven.) Survey responses from Czechia and Germany portray a particularly secular population. In contrast, Poland, Austria and Slovakia show a very high percentage of respondents that profess belief in God.

Frequency of attendance at religious services paints a slightly different picture than mere percentages of believers. This indicator seems to show a more conscious form of religious

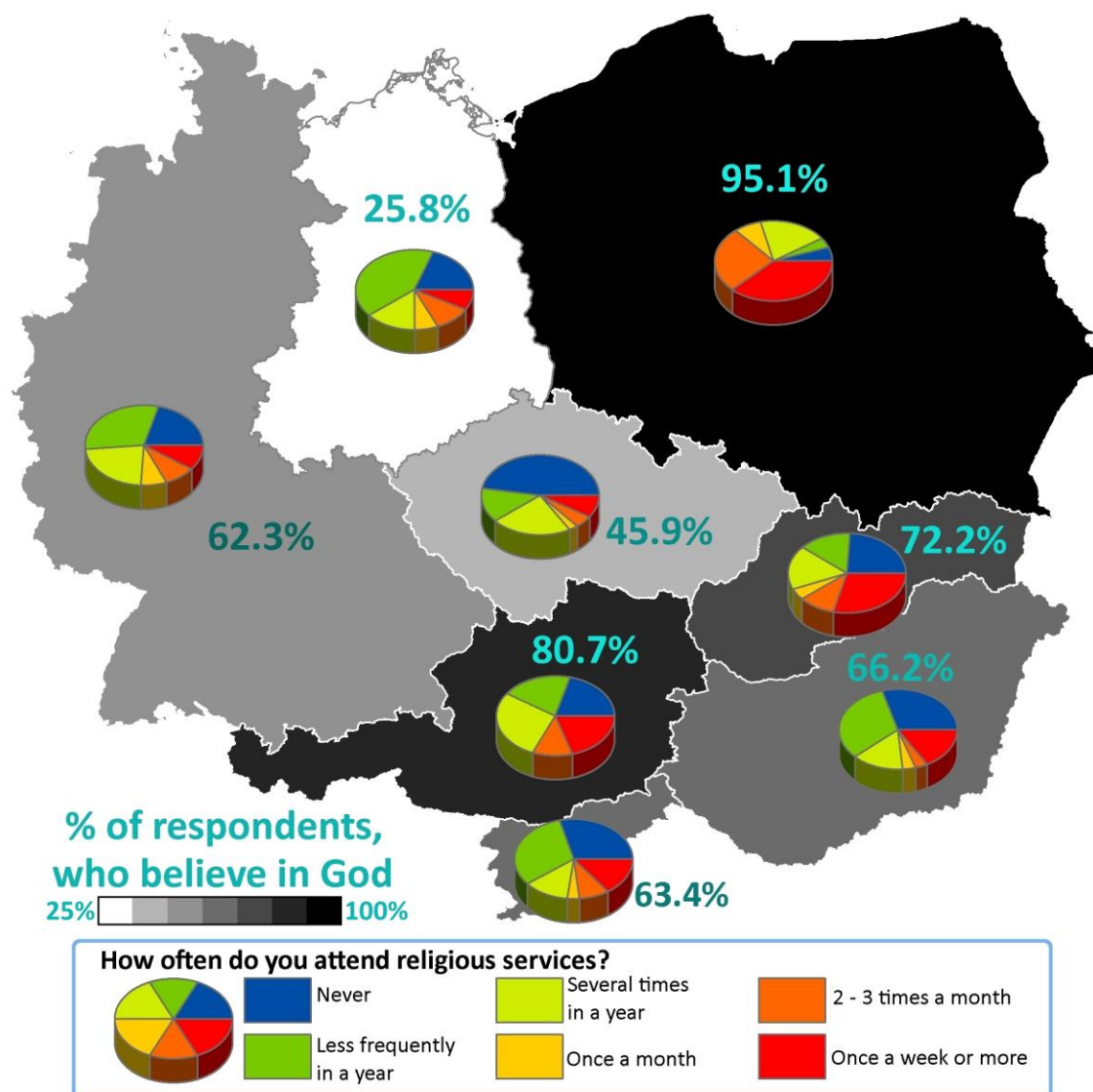


Figure 1. Percentage of survey respondents professing a belief in God and frequency of attendance at religious services (ISSP Research Group 2000).

identity, as agents actively make decisions to include themselves in a community of believers. In terms of attendance at religious services, Czechia stands out as the most secular, while Slovakia appears to have more religious participation than Austria (Figure 1). East and West Germany look very similar in their rates of religious participation but quite different in percentages of believers. The difference between neighbors Czechia and Poland is particularly dramatic.

Much has been written – and much more could be written – to describe the specifics of religious belief and practice and their development over time, in each of Central Europe’s national societies (Knippenberg 2005). Miklós Tomka (2005) compares several states in the region in terms of religion and society, paying particular attention to their recent histories. He describes several ways that communist regimes actively and intentionally worked to undermine religion, impacting most of these states. From the seven, only Austria and parts of Germany (i.e. West Germany) were never subject to communist rule. Tomka explains how modernization and industrialization caused the societal impacts of communist rule to be amplified in the western Eastern Bloc (i.e. Czechia, East Germany, Hungary and Slovenia). In contrast, “Communism did not succeed in liquidating the traditional economy and the rural social system in ... Poland, Slovakia and Romania” (Tomka 2005, p. 22). This explains some of the disparity evident in Figure 1 between, for example, East Germany and Poland or Czechia and Slovakia.

As the studies included in this dissertation focus particularly on Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, I wish to highlight recent findings regarding religiosity and religious identity in these three states of Central Europe, thereby creating a better contextual background within which this dissertation can be appreciated.

René Matlovič, Viera Vlčková, and Kvetoslava Matlovičová (2014) describe changes in religiosity within Slovakia since the fall of communism. Recent statistics demonstrate that the percentage of Slovaks claiming no religious affiliation is increasing. Membership in newer



religious movements is also on the rise, while traditional religions (Roman and Greek Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Lutheranism) show a slight decline. With a survey of college students from select universities throughout Slovakia, Matlovič et. al. (2014, p. 1042) distinguish between simple religious belief, a group which they describe as “emotional believers” and active religious practice or “deep believers”. The deep believer group, defined by a survey of university students, affirm that they regularly attend religious services, plan to marry in a church, have children christened, etc. They comprise 34 percent of those surveyed. The emotional believers make up another 58 percent. Their survey responses indicate a belief in God that is not accompanied by routine religious practices or priorities.

Recent studies of religiosity in Poland portray an ongoing (and possibly increasing) connection between Roman Catholic identity and Polish identity. Elżbieta Bilska-Wodecka (2007) describes an important shift, from World War II to the present, towards a so-called mono-confessional state. The percentage of Roman Catholics from Poland’s total population increased from approximately 65, in 1931, to fluctuate above or near 90 percent from the 1970s through 2003 (Bilska-Wodecka 2007 p. 345). Poland’s totalitarian state encouraged a more unified view of ethnicity – promoting a “single-nation state over a multi-national one” – and it seems that, at least informally, being Roman Catholic was part of being Polish (Bilska-Wodecka 2007 p. 345).

Lucyna Przybylska and Mariusz Czepczyński (2017, p. 23) examine the sacralization of landscape in post-communist Poland, demonstrating ways in which “religiosity revolves around a great deal more than just church attendance”. Przybylska and Czepczyński (2017) describe the importance of Catholicism as a uniting force for the Polish nation. Recent sacralization of the landscape is something of a continuation of the greater institutional power granted to the Roman Catholic Church within the Solidarity movement of the 1980s. “The rapid and widespread sacralisation of the post-communist landscape ... indicates that there exists a strong need on the part of Poles to mark the presence of Catholicism outside

church walls and in various everyday places: on streets, on hills and in parks, in marketplaces and next to schools, etc.” (Przybylska and Czepczyński 2017, p. 38).

Czechia presents an interesting case in terms of religious identity in Europe. Hans Knippenberg (1998) points to Czechia as being secularized to a degree unmatched in the rest of Europe (Havlíček 2005; Havlíček 2006). The combination of modern industrial growth and a totalitarian communist regime, lasting from 1948 to 1989, proved a very effective catalyst to secularization within Czechia. Membership in the Roman Catholic Church, for example, declined from 44 percent in 1950 to 27 percent in 1991 (Havlíček and Klingorová 2017). Even after communism, however, the secularization of Czech society has continued. From 1991 to 2011, the number of people in Prague claiming no religious affiliation increased from 50 to 80 percent (Havlíček 2014). While I must point out that this statistic describing Czechia’s capital – an urban and globally-connected population – should not be *directly* applied to Czech society as a whole, it demonstrates the increasing reluctance of many Czechs to identify themselves with organized religion.

Tomáš Havlíček and Kamila Klingorová (2017) explore the notion of post-secularism – more open views regarding “the re-emergence of public expressions of religion and spirituality” (Beaumont and Baker 2011, p. 3) – in the religious landscape of post-communist Prague. They find that Prague is home to increasing diversity in its religious landscape along with decreasing interest in traditional, institutionalized denominations. These characteristics fit with other studies of post-secular cities in western Europe. Similar to Przybylska and Czepczyński’s (2017) research on Poland, Havlíček and Klingorová (2017) also point to a process of re-sacralization of the landscape after communism. In Prague, however, this sacralization process is motivated more by aesthetic reasons to promote economic activities or to restore a sense of heritage and less by inherently religious purposes.

## Included studies

The four peer-reviewed articles that comprise this dissertation are arranged hereafter by topic. The general order is from larger scale territories to smaller, but there is some overlap as the articles themselves include observations at different scale levels. We begin with an examination of state-sponsored messages with religious themes that were printed and distributed on postage stamps. The study includes seven countries of Central Europe and the postage stamps they published from 2006 to 2010. Next, we explore Christian-themed toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, paying attention to spatial and topical patterns, as well as toponymic change over the past 100 years. The third article focuses on the restitution (or failure thereof) of church property within Czechia to its rightful owners after having been seized by the Communist state in the 1940s. The fourth and final article looks through the eyes of children in small communities along the Czech-Polish and Polish-Slovak borders to understand how they view religious structures in their local landscapes.

### Religious themes in Central European postage stamps, 2006-2010

The first article included in this dissertation examines how seven different Central European states incorporate religious messages into their postage stamps. Postage stamps always include the name of the state that they represent and a monetary value. Beyond that they may include a wide variety of personalities, historical or cultural commemorations. In other words, “stamps convey messages about which historical events, which heritages or even which character traits can be remembered, cherished or developed as national ideals” (Reeves 2015, p. 170).

The article describes the initial formation and early reproduction of the various national identities of Central Europe and the significant role of religion in these processes. It then compares recently published measures of overall religiosity and denominational variation in

the countries in question. These comparisons provide a backdrop against which differing frequencies of religiously themed postage stamps are then analyzed.

A correlation does exist between recent statistical measures of religiosity and the frequency of religiously themed stamps issued from 2006 to 2010. This correlation, however, is not the greatest finding of the article. The so-called “living religion” category, created to describe stamps that portray very recent or ongoing connections between a national community and religion, shows a tighter correlation with recent measures of religiosity and appears to be a clearer indicator of the importance of religious identity as a component of national identity. Categories of “clearly Catholic” and “clearly Protestant” stamps, as well as stamps celebrating religious traditions beyond Christianity further describe the quality of religious elements within the various national identities of Central Europe.

## Christian Toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia

Similar to postage stamps, toponyms present a way that communities of people share meaning about who they are and how they prefer to be identified or understood. This study uses FamilySearch Places, an online database of modern and historic place names, to examine the occurrence of toponyms with a Christian theme in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.

While toponyms are clearly an expression of local identity at the time that they were designated as the recognized name of a given place, they continue to send messages to later generations. In some cases, later inhabitants may choose to change toponyms to better reflect contemporary local identities. Using six model areas – two each in the three countries – we examined all toponyms of populated places, searching for Christian themes. We also examined place name changes involving Christian toponyms over a hundred-year period, in the same model areas.

Slovakia exhibited the highest ratios of Christian toponyms, at both the national and regional scale. Czechia and Poland showed similar ratios, with Czechia showing a slightly greater tendency towards Christian toponyms. Poland had many more instances of toponyms based

on the Christian Saint Mary, while Czechia and Slovakia proved more likely to have place names that included the word Holy/Saint.

Within the model areas, we observed several changes in toponyms that became more secular in nature and some cases where the Christian element disappeared altogether. In the process of the research, we also came across an example of a new Christian toponym from the 1990s and a separate return to a Christian toponym after the fall of Communist Czechoslovakia.

On the whole, Christian toponyms in these three states serve as markers of local heritage, showing respect to the past. Continuing to use a centuries-old place name is clearly on the more passive end of the spectrum of activities that reproduce territorial identities. The creation of new Christian toponyms or changes to existing ones, on the other hand, demonstrate a conscious decision to celebrate religious elements of local identity.

## Secularization and church property: The case of Czechia

This article examines the restitution of properties seized from churches by Czechoslovakia's communist regime. A full twenty years after the fall of communism (the article was written in 2009/2010), Czechia continues to struggle between the need to restore property and ownership rights, on the one hand, and the political will and public opinion of a very secular society, on the other.

The article illustrates a growing rift between Czech society and the local religious organizations seeking the restitution of properties within Czechia that they owned in the beginning of 1948. In contrast to neighboring states – these are discussed in a comparative section of the article – it does not appear likely that the Czech government will reach an agreement that would be acceptable both to the impacted churches and Czech society. The fact that the two sides remain in a stalemate eight years later (Havlíček 2018) demonstrates an unwillingness on the part of the majority of Czechs to identify or sympathize with organized religion.

The ownership of property is a formal, legally codified relationship. While Czechia stands out as being less willing than other Central European states to resolve these historical ownership issues, there is clearly more to the story. Czech society, while willing to admit that religion was important to their forbearers in the 1940s, is balking at the lawfully based request to proclaim that religion is important to Czechia, today. The mayor of Červená Řečice, for example, expressed a strong desire to see disputed Roman Catholic Church properties in her municipality resolved, not because she felt particularly sympathetic towards the church, but because the properties are tied up and have been unavailable for any type of development for more than 20 years. The will is there to give passive support to churches, but the active allocation of assets seems to be too much to ask.

## Children's perceptions of local religious sites in rural Central Europe

This final study focuses on the local identities of children living in rural towns of Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. Cognitive maps, drawn by elementary school students in geographically proximate municipalities near international borders, provide a means of investigating the significance of local religious sites in the minds of young people. This research successfully examines everyday interactions between the subjects and their local landscape. It seeks to highlight religious elements of local identities.

The methods employed in this research present a more humanistic and qualitative approach, shedding light on the daily experiences of children in rural settings. Recognizing the inclusion and even the placement and artistic details of a religious site in a child-drawn map is a powerful way to move research “beyond the ‘officially sacred’” (Brace, et al. 2006, p. 28). The methods also allow for a blending of both passive – including a religious site in a cognitive map – and active – ranking a religious site among the top three *important* places – declarations of a religious element within local, territorial identity.

This study demonstrates how children use elements of the local religious landscape in constructing and re-constructing their community identity. The two Slovak municipalities

showed the greatest affinity for religious elements among the expressions of local identity (children's cognitive maps). Poland's municipalities ranked in the middle and the two Czech municipalities scored lowest in terms of religious sites being considered *important* to the research participants. These results line up quite well with findings of the other articles included in this dissertation. I view these similarities as an indicator of success in exploring religious elements of territorial identities from several different angles and at varying scale levels.

## Conclusion

Territorial identities are a mosaic of many different cultural elements, from which religion is just one subset. Faced with the broad array of ingredients included in this identity mosaic, a detailed examination of a specific subset can lead to a greater understanding of the whole. In that spirit, I set out to explore elements of religion as they are expressed within territorial identities at varying scale levels in Czechia and several neighboring countries. The included studies demonstrate religion's undeniable role as a component of local, regional and national identities in Central Europe.

The use of a religiously themed postage stamp or a Christian toponym, the inclusion of a religious site in a hand drawn map of one's hometown or one's position regarding the return of disputed properties to the churches they were taken from years ago, each of these can be an expression of territorial identity. Notions about where we come from or where we live and how that shapes who we are run very deep. Whether actively practiced or passively acknowledged, religion is bound up in our sense of place. The four separate studies that make up the body of this dissertation present religion's case as an integral ingredient within the territorial identities of Central Europe.

In terms of spatial differences, Slovakia and Poland are more likely, as compared to Czechia, to recognize and include elements of religion in their territorial identities. This is true at both national – postage stamps – and local levels – toponyms and cognitive maps. Each of the methods used to explore the presence of religion in expressions of territorial identity – postage stamps, toponyms and cognitive maps – proved effective. The comparative analyses and case study presented in the article “Secularization and church property: The case of Czechia” also proved effective in shedding light on religion as a component of territorial identities.

The recurring dichotomy of passive and active forms of religious identity and their impacts on territorial identities is, perhaps, the greatest single finding of the research presented in



this dissertation. It is evident in the stamp category describing “living” religion, and in the difference between merely depicting a religious site in a cognitive map and labelling the same as *important*. It is the difference between continuing to use a centuries-old Christian toponym out of passive respect for its origins and coining a new Christian toponym or making an existing one more overtly Christian. It is the difference between a desire to return properties to churches simply as a means of freeing land up for development and seeking to return church properties out of esteem for religious institutions and their role in modern society.

Additional research on the role of religion in territorial identities would benefit greatly from an understanding of passive versus active religious identity. This dichotomy could be the basis for hypotheses and research questions as well as a means of explaining observed conditions, behaviors or spatial patterns.

This dissertation demonstrates the potential of looking “beyond the ‘officially sacred’ ... to explore the everyday, informal, and often banal” (Brace, et al. 2006, p. 28) as a means of understanding the varied components of religion within territorial identities. Much more research could be done in this vein. Different areas of the world, different elements of religion from different denominations or even different portions (i.e. beyond religion) of the cultural mosaic that is territorial identity could provide fertile ground for researchers. With such research, innovative approaches and non-traditional methods can be a great way to shed light on aspects of identity that may otherwise be difficult to isolate and examine.

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## Religious themes in Central European postage stamps, 2006–2010

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The countries of Central Europe present a suitable arena for studying the interplay of religion and nationalism. This study explores religious expressions of national identity through the issue of postage stamps, from 2006 to 2010, in seven Central European countries: Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. While the national societies in question exhibit very different religious inclinations, as expressed through a variety of recent, comparable data, quantitative and qualitative analyses of the stamps they issued over a 5-year period enrich our understanding of the religious elements and traditions that form an integral part of Central European identities. As expected, states with higher relative numbers of religious adherents—Poland, Slovakia, and Austria—produce relatively more religiously themed stamps, particularly stamps that depict “living religion.” Protestant or Catholic traditions can also be traced in the relative frequencies of stamp issues. The stamps demonstrate how states employ religious traditions and heritage to perpetuate a sense of national community.

**Keywords:** Central Europe; religion; national identity; postage stamps; living religion

### Introduction

“All societies that maintain armies maintain the belief that some things are more valuable than life itself.” So begins Billig’s (1995, p. 1) *Banal Nationalism*, a treatise detailing our generally passive acceptance of a global order of nation-states and countries. In his words, banal nationalism refers to “the powers of an ideology which is so familiar that it hardly seems noticeable” (Billig 1995, p. 12). This ongoing yet subtle reproduction of nations encompasses many aspects of local and regional culture, including religion.

The subtle nationalism that Billig (1995) describes has much in common with organized religion. Banal nationalism includes recognizable symbols,

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colors, holidays, and rhetoric, all of which were utilized in religious practices long before the invention of the modern nation-state.

This study examines religion as an aspect of banal nationalism in seven Central European countries: Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Although they border one another as geographical neighbors, the people of these countries exhibit very different collective religious inclinations. Specifically, the study focuses on state-sanctioned expressions of “banal religion” in recently issued postage stamps.

Purchasing and using postage stamps is a routine activity for many people. Every stamp we see bears an image along with the name (or symbol) of the political state that issued it. The coupling of such images, which frequently commemorate significant national events, personalities or traditions, with a political designation of territory clearly demonstrates stamps’ role as “messengers” of national identity and as powerful, everyday elements of visual culture (Billig 1995; Raento and Brunn 2005; Brunn 2011). Stamps convey messages about which historical events, which heritages or even which character traits can be remembered, cherished, or developed as national ideals. As such, stamps are influential elements in the creation and perpetuation of imagined communities (Anderson 1991).

The relationship between national identities and religious identities has been researched numerous times (e.g., Geyer and Lehmann 2004, Tomka 2005). Researchers agree that a critical component of our understanding of this relationship lies in the initial formation of modern national identities, the so-called national awakening. In Central Europe, this occurred primarily between the revolutions of 1848 and World War I (Johnson 1996) although as a process it clearly began much earlier and continues today in the banal reproduction of national identities. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (1991) describes a radical transition from communities with an underlying framework of religious order to societies based upon political order. Over time, the increasingly popular notion of nation replaced the combination of religious affiliation and ethnicity to become the dominant form of collective identity. This was neither a clean nor a complete replacement. Emerging national identities were not constructed in a vacuum. They were built in a complex context which included competing religions and religiously motivated traditions.

Efforts to define German identity had to weather a rough transition from a religious to a political frame-of-reference. Cramer (2004, p. 35) describes discordant nineteenth century histories of the Thirty Years War which “attempted to establish the legitimacy of two opposing visions of the German nation, one Catholic, the other Protestant.” These competing ideologies frequently employed religious themes and comparisons in their respective histories of the German people. Not only did this facilitate a better connection with the common person, it also lent a sense of divine approval or ultimate truth to their arguments:



As national thinking is premised on conflict, that is, the identification of those who belong and those who do not, so too is historical narrative: it defines the criteria of “chosen-ness” and membership through a depiction of the eternal struggle for God’s favor. (Cramer 2004, p. 35)

In another article from German historiography, Hogg (2004) details the difficult position of Silesian Catholic clergy in regards to the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. Although frequently accused of being sympathetic to Hapsburg (Austrian) rule and the *großdeutsch* notion of a unified empire for all Germans, Catholic leaders in Silesia repeatedly declared their loyalty to Prussia, in spite of Prussia’s Protestant majority. Moreover, they decried the efforts of “newspapers ... so shameless as to stir up Catholic and Protestant Germans against each other and to goad them into war in the holy name of religion” (Hogg 2004, p. 58). Clearly being German—in the *kleindeutsch* sense of Prussia and the subsequent North German Confederation—had become a more prominent cohesive force than being Catholic.

On the other side of this conflict, Emperor Franz Joseph I (1866) of Austria-Hungary calls upon “his nations” (or “his peoples,” depending on the translation) to unite with him in prayer before going to battle to right the wrongs committed by “selfish” Prussia. He refers to the impending conflict as a war of the worst kind, Germans against Germans—conveniently ignoring the fact that the vast majority of his own subjects were not German (Martínek 2014). Franz Joseph boldly declares that “One and the same feeling pervades all the inhabitants of my kingdoms and countries—the feeling that they belong to one and the same empire, the feeling of the power that lies in their unity ...” (1866 translated in Harrison von Wright 1907, p. 588).

It is very doubtful that *all* of the inhabitants of the kingdoms and countries ruled by Franz Joseph I—including Austrians (Germans), Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks, and Slovenes—felt a great sense of belonging under the Hapsburg throne, with its German and Catholic predilections. In reality, the various nations of Austria-Hungary were formulating ever stronger reasons for their own respective existence and independence. Hašek’s (1923) satirical stories of the “good soldier Švejk” humorously portray the rifts and inter-ethnic tension that plagued the empire during its final years.

Hanebrink (2004) describes the formation of an ecumenical Christian form of Hungarian identity, based upon *othering* the local Jewish population (Johnson and Coleman 2012). Although Jews in Hungary had been effectively emancipated in 1867, with the establishment of the dual monarchy; in the aftermath of World War I, they took on the unfortunate role of societal scapegoat. Prominent Catholic and Protestant leaders, accustomed to disagreeing with one another, found a common enemy in the Hungarian Jewish community. Jews were blamed for all sorts of problems—of which there was no shortage in postwar Hungary—as political and religious leaders sought to “redeem Christian Hungary” (Hanebrink 2004, title). In spite of their

ideological differences, Catholics and Protestants agreed with and actively promoted the idea that Hungary was a Christian nation.

What happens, however, when the object of nationalistic *othering* goes away? Zubrzycki (2004) examines four contrasting ideological camps that have emerged among Polish Catholics since the fall of the communist regime. “Under communism the Catholic Church held a quasi-monopoly over the production and reproduction of national identity ... because of the party-state’s perceived illegitimacy” (Zubrzycki 2004, p. 176). Now, as the 1998 “war of the crosses” demonstrates, various groups within Poland express very different views on the church’s role in their independent state. And yet, regardless of their different opinions all of these groups recognize and support strong ties between Catholicism and the Polish nation. “Catholicism is so closely associated with the Polish nation that there is no perceived tension between the universalist reach of the religion and its nationalist interpretation” (Zubrzycki 2004, p. 197). In the words of Polish poet Mickiewicz: “Only under this cross, only under this sign, Poland is Poland and a Pole is a Pole” (quoted in Zubrzycki 2004, p. 197).

While the above examples of religious themes in the construction of imagined communities are situated primarily in the past, their influence continues in the present:

Both in the past and in the present the churches had a significant role in maintaining national identity in Central Europe, especially among ethnic minorities. Different ethnic groups adopted different beliefs. “Their” religion helped them to preserve their distinct socio-cultural identity. This is the case, of course, with the Poles. There are parallels in most other countries. German diaspora in Hungary and Romania adopted Lutheranism as “its” religion. Hungarians defined Presbyterianism as “the Hungarian religion” against “Hapsburg Catholicism.” The Czechoslovak National Church emerged as the new Czechoslovak nation and state was born. Romanians emphasized Orthodoxy as “their” religion. Serbs, Croats and Bosnians differ not by their language, but by their Orthodox, Catholic or Muslim traditions. In all these examples, religion is not only a label but an expression and a dimension of identity, including some and excluding others. Most motives for the protection of this identity are non religious [*sic*]. (Tomka 2005, pp. 18–19)

Tomka (2005) insightfully recognizes non-religious motives for the perpetuation of religious national identities. Each of the above examples of identity formation in different areas of Central Europe has its own utilitarian ingredients.

While it is clear that each of Central Europe’s nations retains its own flavor of historic, religious heritage, it is also clear that processes of secularization have impacted the way modern nations commemorate or *employ* this religious heritage, in the present.

Put very simply, the secularization paradigm states that “the project of organized religion loses its social significance as societies modernize” (Wilford 2010, p. 329). This is generally accomplished through the compartmentalization

and privatization of religion. Wilford (2010) advocates the recognition of differentiated and fragmented space—"sacred archipelagos"—in regard to religious activities and appropriately identifies the local, micro-scale as deserving greater attention in studies of the geography of religion. Increased attention to the micro-scale, however, should not lead researchers to ignore the bigger picture. Nation-states continue to communicate "banal religion" at the macro-level. And postage stamps, "products of the state that illustrate how it wishes to be seen by its own citizens and those beyond its boundaries" (Brunn 2001, p. 315), are a prominent example of such communication. By issuing a stamp with a religious theme, a political state publicly commemorates a religious tradition, heritage or hero, thereby validating the role (contemporary or historic) of a particular type of religion in its national society.

Brace *et al.* (2006, p. 28) wish to see geographic analysis of religious identity formation move "beyond the 'officially sacred' ... to explore ... everyday, informal and often banal, practices." Recognizing the contested nature of any process of identity formation, they call for additional research at various scales that will "restore sensitivity to the historic and contemporary, symbolic and communal aspects of religious identity formation and its spatialities" (Brace *et al.* 2006, p. 35).

In her recent review of geography of religion research, Kong (2010, p. 769) applauds efforts to examine "spaces of everyday life that may occasionally ... be infused and shaped by religious values but which are not overtly nor primarily about religion." She hints at the existence of parallels between functional or symbolic dimensions of religion and other phenomena—including nationalism—encouraging work that would "draw appropriate analytical implications of geographical research on religion for these other phenomena and for human geography more generally" (Kong 2010, p. 770).

This examination of banal religion in the postage stamps recently issued by seven Central European nations seeks to deepen our understanding of religion's role in the banal reproduction of nations.

### **Initial expectations**

Considering the vast differences in basic indicators of religiosity in the selected countries (Table 1), one can certainly expect to find significant differences in portrayals of religion on recently issued postage stamps. Specifically, I anticipate that Central European states with a higher percentage of people declaring belief in God or affiliation with a church will exhibit a higher ratio of issued stamps communicating a religious theme.

While such quantitative outcomes are enlightening, they only tell part of the story. Qualitative content analysis techniques enable one to unlock many of the subtle messages conveyed through religiously themed stamps. Through coding and enumerating common themes, I expect to find relatively more stamps celebrating a specific religious denomination (Catholic or Protestant) in countries with more homogenous profiles of religious adherents (e.g.,

Table 1. A sampling of international survey responses on the topic of religion.

Country	I believe there is a God <sup>a</sup> (%)	Religion important in life <sup>b</sup> (%)	Attend services at least once a month <sup>b</sup> (%)	Traditional/rational value score <sup>b</sup>	Unaffiliated with any religion <sup>c</sup> (%)
Austria	54	54	43	0.25	14
Czechia	19	20	12	1.23	76
Germany	47	39 W	34 W	1.17 W	25
		16 E	12 E	1.44 E	
Hungary	44	42	18	0.4	19
Poland	80	84	78	-0.43	6
Slovakia	61	58	50	0.67	14
Slovenia	37	37	31	0.95	18

Note: Data for *Religion important in life* and *Attend services at least once a month* are aggregate values combined from multiple answers (e.g., very important and rather important). Data from the 1999 World Values Survey were collected and published separately for East (E) and West (W) Germany.

Sources: <sup>a</sup>European Commission (2005); <sup>b</sup>World Values Survey (1999); <sup>c</sup>Pew Research Center (2012).

Poland or Austria), and more balanced ratios of denomination-specific stamps in countries with multiple prominent denominations (e.g., Germany or Hungary).

Beyond these simple expectations, I am interested in answering a number of research questions. How directly—or indirectly—do the stamps approach religious themes? To what degree do the religiously themed postage stamps of various countries present subject matter that could be considered “living religion,” i.e., very recent events, people or practices? How do the seven Central European countries compare in issuing religiously themed stamps that celebrate (1) art and architecture, (2) people and events, or (3) traditions?

## Methods

A study of the messages conveyed through postage stamps is clearly a form of content analysis and requires careful coding (Cope 2005). Considering the unique subject matter and objectives of this research, I developed a coding system specific to this study. It was implemented in two primary phases: first, compiling all stamps issued and determining those that convey religious themes and, second, reviewing and categorizing religiously themed stamps into a number of interpretive codes.

Cope (2005) is careful to point out the necessity of recognizing both the manifest and latent messages present in any content analysis. Because the primary focus of this research is on banal religion in Central European national identities and because latent messages are a vital part of said banality, this study does not gather or present data on local populations’ perceptions of the studied stamps. Simply stated this research asks whether or not religious

messages are being conveyed through issued postage stamps. It does not examine the degree to which such messages are received or comprehended by the communities they are meant to represent.

Using data from the various postal services and from the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP 2011), I compiled a database of stamps issued by the seven selected countries from 2006 to 2010. In determining what constituted a stamp issue, this study utilizes the methodology employed by Brunn (2001, 2011), Raento and Brunn (2005, 2008), and Covington and Brunn (2006), recognizing all visually distinct stamps that were issued, within the period from 2006 to 2010, with a monetary value and for the purpose of sending mail. "Visually distinct" is defined rather loosely, so as to reduce duplication within stamp issue totals. For instance, stamps that were otherwise identical, but which were issued with two different borders, are counted as one issue.

Because data on the number of stamps included in each issue are not consistently available for the seven countries, this study examines stamp *issues* with religious themes. It does not concern itself with how many of each visually distinct stamp were published and distributed as part of a single issue. Consequently, for the comparisons presented below, a stamp issue is equal to all other issues regardless of its relative size.

With every stamp issue, the issuing national postal service publishes an image of the new stamp on its website. Generally, each image is accompanied by a short text detailing the theme and significance of the new issue. I carefully examined each stamp and its accompanying text (where available) to determine whether or not it merited inclusion as a religiously themed stamp. In passing judgment on stamps that were not immediately clear to me, I asked the following questions. What is being commemorated? Which themes are primary and which are secondary? What might people think about as they view this image? Does the text specifically mention religious elements alluded to in the stamp's design? In the end, I focused on being as consistent as I could for the entire collection of assessed stamps. For example, I excluded stamps that commemorated a cityscape and happened to include a cathedral, but included stamps that celebrated cathedrals or monasteries, themselves, as architectural monuments or cultural symbols for a town or region. I realize that some of my classifications, concerning what is or is not religious, could be disputed. With this in mind, I was careful to make all of the judgment calls myself, so as to make a subjectively consistent comparison from country to country.

After compiling this collection of Central European stamps that communicate a religious message, I created some thematic categories (codes) as a means of adding structure to the content analysis. Similar to what Covington and Brunn (2006) present, in their case with music stamps, these thematic categories make it possible to expand the analysis of religiously themed postage stamps along a number of dimensions.

### **The political process of stamp issue selection**

As noted above, processes of identity formation are dynamic and contested, and this leads to certain questions regarding the messages conveyed through postage stamps. Who decides what images and themes to place on a new postage stamp? How do these decision makers come to their ultimate decisions?

According to J. Novotný (personal communication, 3 March 2014), director of Czechia's Postal Museum, the common practice in most countries is to organize a committee of specialists that is tasked with reviewing stamp proposals and selecting stamps that would appropriately represent their respective national community. Institutions, individuals, or other entities may submit stamp proposals for review. In Czechia, this committee of "external specialists" (representing a variety of professions and cultural interests) operates under the direction of the Ministry of Industry and Trade to finalize a production plan for all of the next year's stamp issues. This plan is then passed on to Czech Post, whose Division of Stamp Creation implements it.

In some cases, government mandates will provide selection committees rough outlines of a desired series of stamps and ask them to work out the details necessary to effectively prepare and issue postage stamps in fulfillment of the country's annual emission plan. Vančo (2010) describes how this process was realized to prepare the first set of Slovak stamp issues based on the Euro (January 2009). Recognizing the need for national stamp selection committees to be in touch with the imagined communities they represent, Vančo (2010, author's translation) points out:

As both a fee stamp and a miniature graphical composition, a postage stamp should not be a mere utilitarian fossil, rather it should reflect the period of its origin. Similar to a work of art that is not merely an aesthetically pleasing object or a private statement of the artist, but which is also a testimony to contemporary society.

Proceeding under the assumption that selection committees and postal societies seek to prepare stamps that accurately represent the national communities for whom they are made, we can explore the religious characteristics of the national societies in this study and then consider what the stamps themselves have to say.

### **Religious attitudes and behavior in Central Europe**

Vast differences are evident within Central Europe, in terms of societal values, attitudes, and practices relating to religion. Data from a number of large international surveys paint an informative picture of the religious climate of these seven Central European countries. They provide a useful context for understanding and interpreting the stamps issued by the same countries.

**Table 1** presents a small sampling of statistics on religion for the seven countries in question. The selected data are indicative of broader trends and represent the most relevant and revealing statistics from the datasets explored in this study. Poland and Czechia stand out with extreme values, respectively, in religious and non-religious sentiment. East Germany (treated independently in the 1999 World Values Survey) does appear to be even more secular than Czechia; however, as it represents less than a quarter of Germany's total population, these figures fail to even approximately describe the situation for all of Germany. Thus, available data point to Poland as the most likely of these countries to exhibit a strong religious component of national identity. The Czech nation, on the other hand, seems least likely to collectively endorse organized religion.

Special Eurobarometer 225, prepared and published by the European Union (EU) in 2005, asked respondents: "Which of the following statements comes closest to your beliefs?" While 80% of those questioned in Poland selected the statement "I believe there is a God," only 19% of Czech respondents selected this same affirmation (**Table 1**). Among the other five countries in this study, the percentage of respondents professing belief in a god ranges from 37% (Slovenia) to 61% (Slovakia). Looking at the other side of responses to this same question, 30% of those surveyed in Czechia selected the statement "I don't believe there is any sort of spirit, God or life force;" compared with 2% of the Polish sample. Again, the remaining countries lie between the Czech and Polish extremes (ranging from 25% in Germany to 8% in Austria).

The World Values Survey from 1999 is the most recent to include all seven of these Central European Countries. **Table 1** includes two specific questions on religion and one of two value scores—the traditional/rational values dimension, derived from views on religion and local traditions in contrast with so-called, rational and logical responses. Respondents in Poland are clearly most likely, from the seven countries in question, to attend religious services at least once a month and to consider religion to be an important component of life. Czech respondents are at the other end of the spectrum on both of these questions (with the notable and previously mentioned exception of East Germany). The traditional/rational value is particularly relevant to this study. As an aggregate raw score between traditional (−2) and secular-rational (+2) poles it accounts for a wide variety of societal positions (Inglehart and Welzel 2010):

The Traditional/Secular-rational values dimension reflects the contrast between societies in which religion is very important and those in which it is not. A wide range of other orientations are closely linked with this dimension. Societies near the traditional pole emphasize the importance of parent-child ties and deference to authority, along with absolute standards and traditional family values, and reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide. These societies have high levels of national pride, and a nationalistic outlook. Societies with secular-rational

values have the opposite preferences on all of these topics. (World Values Survey 2012)

Significantly, this paragraph alludes to a correlation between societies in which religion is important and societies that have high levels of national pride. In accordance with these findings, societies with a strong sense for tradition and religion could be expected to publish such sentiments in their postage stamps.

The traditional/rational dimension exhibits a greater departure from the general ordering of the seven countries from most to least religious. While Slovakia ranks as the second most religiously inclined nation in all of the other indicators in Table 1, it is fourth in this dimension, behind Poland, Austria, and Hungary. This indicator is Hungary's only appearance in the upper half (the top three positions) of the more religiously inclined, a group that is otherwise limited to Poland, Slovakia, and Austria.

The final column in Table 1 presents data from a study recently published by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (Pew Research Center 2012). The column lists the percent of respondents from each of the seven countries that claim no affiliation to any religion. As with the traditional/rational value score, lower values of this indicator signify a society that exhibits greater affinity for religion. The extreme contrast between Czechia (76%) and the other six states is remarkable. Germany (25%), the second highest result of the seven, is more than 50 percentage points lower. Polish respondents to this survey again represent the opposite extreme, with only 6% claiming no religious affiliation.

Whether or not Czechs believe in God, they seem to have more negative attitudes toward various forms of organized religion. This will likely be reflected in the amount and types of religiously themed stamps issued in Czechia, as compared with the other states in the sample.

In addition to general statistics indicating how these national societies regard religion, it is important to look at the types of religion they tend to prefer. Figure 1 displays the percentages of respondents to the World Values Survey that claim affiliation with various religious denominations. It is important to note that these percentages are taken from the total number of religious adherents and not from the total number of survey respondents in a given country. Thus, only a third of Czechia's respondents to the question "Do you belong to a religious denomination?" are represented in these percentages (World Values Survey 1999). The remaining two-thirds claimed no religious affiliation and are, therefore, not included in Figure 1.

Germany and Hungary appear to be the most religiously diverse of the seven countries in the study. Roman Catholicism dominates among the religious adherents of Poland, Slovenia, and Austria, and to a lesser degree in Czechia and Slovakia. Noticeable concentrations of Muslims are apparent in the data for Germany and Slovenia. Higher relative numbers of Orthodox are



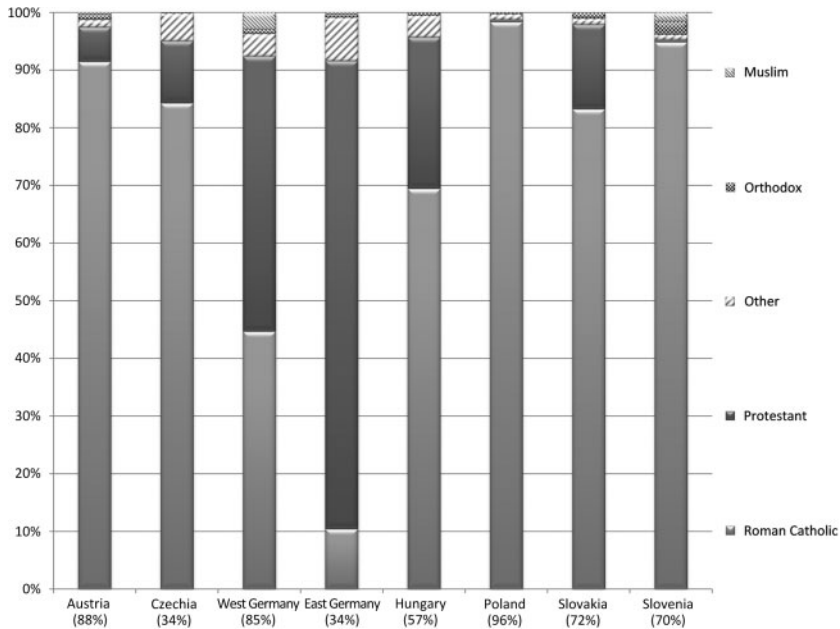


Figure 1. Structure of religious adherents by country in 1999.

Note: Percentages in parentheses after country names denote the ratio of respondents that answered this question, i.e., those that claim affiliation with a religious denomination.

Source: World Values Survey (1999).

found in Slovenia, Slovakia, and Austria. I expect to find these denominational ratios reflected in the qualitative analysis of stamp issues.

### Religious stamp issues: ratios and trends

A simple comparison, in the seven selected states, of the portion of issued stamps that have a religious theme shows evident international differences in state-sanctioned religious expressions of national identity. Table 2 presents annual totals of stamps issued with a religious theme as a portion of all stamp issues, both by year and for the entire 2006–2010 period. Slovakia (31.4%) and Hungary (21.4%) emerge as the clear leaders. The percentage of religiously themed issues in Poland is not quite half (14.3%) as much as that of Slovakia, its neighbor to the south, while the remainder of the selected countries shows progressively lower percentages, ending with Slovenia (8.4%).

Viewing Table 2, in light of the anticipated results (as stated above), it is immediately clear that Poland—statistically the most religious nation—does not have the highest ratio of religiously themed stamps. Neither does Czechia

Table 2. Stamps issued with a religious theme as a portion of all stamps issued from 2006 to 2010.

Country	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		Entire period		
	R	T	R	T	R	T	R	T	R	T	R	T	%
Austria	8	59	8	64	5	91	7	60	10	59	38	333	11.4
Czechia	7	42	3	40	5	45	6	34	4	44	25	205	12.2
Germany	5	59	8	57	8	52	6	53	7	54	34	275	12.4
Hungary	14	75	14	62	10	56	13	76	21	68	72	337	21.4
Poland	7	70	8	47	7	63	10	58	8	41	40	279	14.3
Slovakia	3	21	7	24	6	24	14	30	8	22	38	122	31.4
Slovenia	2	34	4	55	4	33	4	48	4	44	18	214	8.4

Note: R denotes stamps with a religious theme, while *T* represents the total number of stamps issued in a given year.

Sources: Deutsche Post (2011), Magyar Posta (2011), Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu České republiky (2011), Österreichische Post (2011), Poczta Polska (2011), Pošta Slovenije (2011), Poštová filatelistická služba (2011), WADP (2011), author's analysis.

—the least religious of the seven nations—exhibit the lowest ratio. The hypothesis of higher religiosity being related to a higher ratio of religiously themed stamps does not appear to be valid, at least not completely. There is clearly more to the story.

To achieve a better understanding of the relationship between the data presented on religious behavior (Table 1) and ratios of stamp issues with religious themes (Table 2), I considered the rankings of the seven countries in both areas. Table 3 aggregates information from Tables 1 and 2 and simply displays the rankings of the seven countries in the study in terms of religiosity (a mathematical average of intraregional rankings compiled from Table 1, in which 1 represents the most religiously inclined of the seven nations) and production of religiously themed stamps (ratios from Table 2, in which 1 is the highest ratio).

Table 3. Collective rankings in terms of religiosity (Table 1) and production of religiously themed stamps (Table 2).

Country	Religiosity	Religious stamps
Austria	3	6
Czechia	7	5
Germany	6	4
Hungary	4	2
Poland	1	3
Slovakia	2	1
Slovenia	5	7

Source: Author's calculations.

For the most part, the rankings of a given country in [Table 3](#) do not differ much although none of the countries holds the same ranking in religiosity and religious stamp production. Austria is the only country of the seven that exhibits a discrepancy larger than two between the two rankings presented (see below for a possible explanation). The statistical principle of regression to the mean is helpful in understanding why Poland and Czechia do not stand out from their peers in terms of issuing stamps with religious themes. The likelihood of these countries exhibiting extreme values in *two* distinct measures (religiosity and religious stamp production) is considerably less than the likelihood of an extreme in one or the other.

Recognizing trends in special commemorative stamps can aid in explaining larger-than-expected discrepancies between the rankings in [Table 3](#) as well as some of the year-to-year fluctuation, in terms of religiously themed and overall stamp issues. For example, Austria issued 41 unique stamps, during 2008 alone, to celebrate the Union of European Football Association's 2008 European Cup, which took place in Austria and Switzerland. In the same year, Austria issued eight stamps commemorating the 2008 Vienna International Postage Stamp Exhibition, only the sixth such exhibition since 1881 and certainly a significant event for the international community of stamp collectors. Not only do these 49 commemorative stamp issues represent more than half of Austria's stamp issues in 2008 ([Table 1](#)), they also help explain the very low relative number of religiously themed issues (only five stamp issues out of 91). This was the lowest single year percentage (5.5%) of religiously themed stamps issued by any of the countries, during the entire 5-year period.

In contrast, the highest annual percentage of stamp issues with a religious theme (46.7%) was recorded in Slovakia, in 2009. This was, again, due to the introduction of a special set of stamps, this time with a religious theme. Twelve of Slovakia's fourteen religiously themed stamp issues (from a total of 30 issued stamps in 2009) commemorate the Roman architecture of a number of the country's oldest Christian churches. [Figure 2](#) is one of the stamps from the special series. The wide variety of incremental monetary values connected with these particular stamps (from 0.01 through 2.00 EUR) as well as the fact that they were all issued on 2 January 2009 confirm that this commemorative series was an integral part of the transition from stamps based on the Slovak Crown to stamps based on the Euro; a transition that began with the new year, when Slovakia officially entered the Eurozone and adopted the Euro as its currency (Vančo 2010). The inclusion of latent religious messages in such an integral series of stamps makes a significant statement regarding how Slovakia views its own religious identity and how it wishes to be perceived by other nations.

### **Stamp categories and messages**

Exploring religious themes as numbers and percentages is only one method to begin to uncover what various countries are communicating through the issue



Figure 2. Hamuliakovo 2009. This stamp was printed in Slovakia's first series of Euro-based postage stamps.

Source: WADP 2011. Image reprinted with permission from Slovenská pošta, a.s./D. Kállay.

of new postage stamps, in other words what types of national identity political states choose to promote. To take this analysis of religious expressions of national identity further, I employed qualitative methods of assessment to the collection of Central European stamp issues. Table 4 summarizes a number of thematic divisions, made after going through the stamps several times and considering the messages they convey.

The first of these divisions looks at the dominant religious tradition upon which each of the 265 religiously themed stamps appears to be based. The three primary categories: Christian, other traditions (i.e., Judaism and Islam), and generally spiritual (clearly religious but lacking a definitive connection to any one tradition), are exclusive, meaning that each stamp was placed into one and only one of these categories. Not surprisingly, the Christian category dominates, even to the point of being the only category represented in Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. And so, at a time when EU leaders were hotly debating the issue of whether or not to include a statement about Christian heritage and Christian ideals in the preamble to an EU Constitution, the postage stamps of seven EU

Table 4. Percentages of religiously themed stamps issued by category.

Country	Religious tradition					Holidays		“Living religion”	Other common themes		
	Christian			Other traditions	Generally spiritual	Clearly religious	Less evident	Recent themes	Art and architecture	People and events	Traditions
	From which										
	Catholic	Protestant									
Austria	97	43	–	3	–	18	13	16	55	37	5
Czechia	96	21	17	4	–	16	20	–	64	16	20
Germany	82	18	18	9	9	29	–	18	53	50	6
Hungary	86	16	10	14	–	15	7	3	78	18	7
Poland	100	33	–	–	–	25	33	25	28	23	28
Slovakia	100	13	8	–	–	11	13	–	74	18	13
Slovenia	100	33	6	–	–	22	33	11	28	28	33

Note: The Catholic and Protestant categories show percentages based on the number of stamps categorized as Christian and not the total number of religiously themed stamps.

Sources: Deutsche Post (2011), Magyar Posta (2011), Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu České republiky (2011), Österreichische Post (2011), Poczta Polska (2011), Pošta Slovenije (2011), Poštová filatelistická služba (2011), WADP (2011), author’s analysis.

Member States continued to proclaim close ties to Christianity without facing much, if any, political opposition. Clearly, the question of whether to acknowledge Christianity in a constitution represents a significantly different scale level than the celebration of Christian heritage on a postage stamp.

Rounding out the religious tradition division are the “other traditions” and “generally spiritual” categories. In Austria, Czechia, and Germany, all of the other-tradition stamps commemorate Jewish themes, celebrating World War II era historical events and personalities, a much older historical figure (Prague’s Rabbi Löw) or cultural artwork. In Hungary, 6 out of 10 other-tradition stamps present Jewish synagogues while the remaining four honor historic Islamic architecture in the city of Pécs. Figure 3 displays stamps that exemplify these various religious traditions, including both Catholic and Protestant Christian themes, as well as Jewish and Islamic “other traditions.”



Figure 3. Examples from the primary divisions of religiously themed stamp issues. The Polish stamp (upper left), celebrating 30 years since John Paull II’s election as Pope, is a “clearly Catholic,” Christian stamp. The stamp in the upper right commemorating the 500 year anniversary of John Calvin’s birth is a “clearly Protestant,” Christian stamp. Stamps in the lower left (Prague’s Rabbi Löw) and in the middle of the upper row (a mosque in Pécs, Hungary) represent the “other-traditions” category. The *Ehrenamt* [Volunteerism] stamp in the lower right is a “generally spiritual” stamp.

Source: WADP (2011). Images courtesy Deutsche Post AG, Hungarian Post Ltd/Elekes Attila, Polska SA/Marzanna Dąbrowska, and Czech Post/K. Zeman and J. Tvrdoň.

Evaluating stamps from Germany led me to create a new category for generally spiritual stamps: those that, although they reference religion in a general sense, cannot be categorized in accordance with established religious traditions. For example, the *Ehrenamt* [volunteerism] stamp, shown in [Figure 3](#), clearly celebrates religion (*Kirche*) as an important element of society, without giving any indication of what type of religion might be preferred. With these “non-denominational” stamp issues, Germany presents itself as an innovator, among these seven countries, promoting a multi-cultural and more broadly accepting view of various religious traditions. Considering its geo-political and economic position as a Western world leader and its long-term role as a receiving country for international immigration, this is not surprising. It will be interesting to observe if, when and how other Central European countries might begin to follow this lead and more conscientiously celebrate increasing diversity—religious and otherwise—within their own borders.

To further explore what types of Christianity these various political states are celebrating, additional sub-categories account for clearly Catholic and clearly Protestant stamps. Essentially, these sub-categories take the broad religious division, described above, a step further—where such a step is possible. Findings from the Catholic and Protestant divisions shed light on national attitudes, concerning religious heritage and current trends in religious participation. I found it difficult to draw a distinct line between Christian-themed stamps that were either “clearly Catholic” or “clearly Protestant” and those that were not. Many stamps could not be definitively placed in either of these categories. This means that the Catholic and Protestant sub-categories do not add up to 100% of the Christian-themed stamps. As a matter of fact, they do not even add up to 50% of the Christian stamps in any of the seven countries ([Table 4](#)).

Austria and Poland demonstrate a dominant Catholic tradition by publishing a large portion of clearly Catholic stamps and no clearly Protestant stamps during the researched time period. Slovenia has a similarly high ratio of Catholic-themed stamps with a comparatively small sampling of Protestant-themed stamps. Catholic themes also outnumber Protestant in Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia, but to a lesser degree. Germany’s equal ratio in this measure reiterates its apparent intention to be viewed as a religiously neutral, multi-denominational state.

These results correspond quite well with the data presented in [Figure 1](#), describing ratios of religious adherents—from each of the seven countries—that claim affiliation with various religious denominations. In this regard, religiously themed stamps communicate a form of national identity that is in line with the dominant religious traditions of their respective nations. In many cases, however, these religious traditions are relics of earlier periods. While they might still be present in local and regional folk traditions, with few exceptions, religious beliefs and behaviors no longer accurately represent the majority of people in modern, Central European societies (Tomka 2005).



Recent holiday stamp issues provide an example of folk traditions outpacing more overtly religious themes in many of these Central European countries. While I did include all stamp issues that commemorate traditionally religious holidays, I divided such stamps into two groups: “clearly religious” and “less evident.” The clearly religious holiday stamps include images that present religious holiday themes in a prominent manner, with limited attempts to downplay religious elements. In some cases, particularly for Christmas and Easter, the presence or absence of the name of the holiday was a deciding factor for placing a stamp into one or the other of these two holiday categories. “Less evident” holiday stamps generally depict modern holiday scenes or folk traditions—dyed eggs, Easter whips (Czechia and Slovakia), Christmas trees, etc.—and either do not include or significantly downplay any overtly religious themes. [Figure 4](#) presents examples of “clearly religious” (on the right) and “less evident” (left) holiday stamps. Although the Hungarian Easter stamp (lower right) in [Figure 4](#) does include the name of the Easter holiday (Húsvét), the themes in the stamp itself caused me to place it in the “less evident” category.

Holiday stamp issues are most common—as a percentage—in Poland and Slovenia, accounting for more than half of all issues with religious themes. In both countries “less evident” holiday stamps outnumber clearly religious, in Slovenia by a three-to-two margin. Czechia and Slovakia also issued more less-evident than clearly religious holiday stamps; although in Slovakia, the difference was only one stamp (two percentage points). Austria, Hungary, and Germany, on the other hand, published more clearly religious holiday stamps. Hungary issued twice as many clearly religious holiday depictions as it did less evident holiday stamps. Surprisingly, *all* of Germany’s holiday stamp issues fit into the clearly religious category. They are all clearly labeled Christmas stamps with artwork depicting the Nativity of Christ. Perhaps the greater religious plurality of Hungary and Germany motivates these countries to commemorate religious holidays more directly than their neighboring countries. In a general sense, Christian holidays can be viewed as a unifying element for Germans and Hungarians with differing, yet Christian, religious views. On the other hand, in countries with a single dominant religion—i.e., Catholicism in Austria, Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia—more nuanced depictions of holidays that focus on common folk traditions could be seen as a means of promoting unity among believers (primarily Catholics) and non-believers.

To further explore the notion of modern manifestations of religion, or “living religion,” as opposed to the mere recognition of religious heritage in postage stamp issues, I made a separate count of recent religious themes. I consider stamps commemorating events or personalities that occurred or lived during the past 40 years to be examples of “living religion.” In addition to datable stamp themes, the category also includes two stamps from Germany that reference religion as they promote modern societal values: volunteerism and thanksgiving. I did not include stamps commemorating longstanding





Figure 4. Examples of holiday stamp issues. The two stamps on the left are “clearly religious” holiday stamps from Slovenia and Austria, while the Slovak and Hungarian stamps on the right represent “less evident” holiday stamps.

Source: WADP (2011). The Slovakian stamp is reprinted with permission from Slovenská pošta, a.s./Vladimír Machaj. Other images courtesy Hungarian Post Ltd/Szalma Edit, Österreichische Post AG/A. Tuma, and Pošta Slovenije d.o.o./A. Čufer, J. Fink and J. Košnik.

traditions that still happen to be observed (i.e., Christmas trees), *unless* the stamps present a strong case of modern-day relevance. I chose to include six such stamps. Five of these depict Catholic pilgrimages and indicate that pilgrimage activities continue today (Figure 5). The other: *Mój szczęśliwy dzień*, is a Polish stamp celebrating what appears to be an individual's first Catholic communion as "my happy day" (Figure 6). The subject and presentation of this stamp communicate the importance that modern Polish society ascribes to an individual's first communion. Figures 5 and 6 present a sampling of the living religion stamps.

As with the other categories described above, the percentage of *recent* religious themes out of the total number of stamp issues with religious themes facilitates country-to-country comparison within Central Europe. Fully one quarter of Poland's religiously themed stamp issues convey messages of living religion. Germany and Austria exhibit relatively high percentages for this category followed by lower relative numbers in Slovenia and Hungary.



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Figure 5. Three pilgrimage stamps. These stamps from Poland, Hungary, and Austria commemorate Catholic pilgrimages that continue to this day. They are classified as "living religion" and "clearly Catholic" stamps.

Source: WADP (2011). Images courtesy Hungarian Post Ltd/Baticz Barnabás, Poczta Polska SA/Patrycja Orzechowska, Österreichische Post AG.



Figure 6. *Mój szczęśliwy dzień* [My happy day] 2007; a “living religion” stamp. Source: WADP (2011). Image courtesy Poczta Polska SA/Joanna Górka.

Czechia and Slovakia issued no living religious themes on their postage stamps from 2006 to 2010.

It appears that while Czech and Slovak societies recognize the role of religious heritage in their national identities, they are less eager to celebrate modern manifestations of religion. In Czechia, in particular, any depiction of modern religious practice on a postage stamp would only speak to a small minority of the country’s population (Table 1). Reasons for Slovakia’s apparent aversion to living religion stamps, and for that matter to clearly religious holiday stamps, are less clear. On the other hand, Austrian, German and especially Polish societies seem to be relatively more comfortable with modern religious themes as expressions of their own respective national identities.

Germany’s high number of living religion stamps, particularly in light of its relatively low ranking in terms of religiosity (Table 3), suggests greater acceptance within German society for a variety of religious views. A number of Germany’s living religion stamps seem to speak to the “spiritual but not religious” ideology (Fuller 2001), including those that make up the generally spiritual category discussed above. Perhaps we are seeing the beginnings of a shift, within Central Europe, toward more favorable societal attitudes regarding spirituality. Again, time will tell if and how Germany’s Central European neighbors follow this lead.

Poland issued four stamps during the 5-year period commemorating popes. These are all included in among the living religion stamps. Three of the four stamp issues depict Pope John Paul II, a native Pole who served as Pope from 1978 to 2005. As Karol Józef Wojtyła (name before being elected Pope), he was a respected leader of Polish Catholics during the communist period. Pope John Paul II continues to be revered in Poland as a spiritual father to the





Figure 7. Traditions; art and architecture; people and events. These three stamps provide examples of three thematic categories from Table 4. Slovenia's stamp portrays a religious Christmas tradition. Slovakia's stamp depicts religious artwork and Germany's stamp commemorates Pope Benedict XVI.

Source: WADP (2011). The Slovakian stamp is reprinted with permission from Slovenská pošta, a.s./Pavol Choma and Martin Činovský. Other images courtesy Pošta Slovenije d.o.o./Gorazd Učakar and Deutsche Post AG.

Polish people and embodies the close relationship between Catholicism and the Polish nation.

Table 4's living religion column presents perhaps the most significant results of the study. Not only do Czechia and Poland actually find themselves at their corresponding religious-sentiment poles (very secular or very religious, respectively) in this measure; Slovakia and Hungary—the two most productive countries of the seven, in terms of relative religiously themed

stamp issues—are noticeably absent. This measure of stamp activity holds the promise of being a better barometer of the current attitudes of the societies represented. It would be interesting to track living religion stamps in this region over a longer period of time.

The final columns presented in [Table 4](#) categorize religious stamp issues into three broad classifications: art and architecture, people and events, and traditions. These classes are not exclusive—the same stamp could be counted in more than one. Nonetheless, they do provide a comparative typology of the religiously themed stamps issued by the seven countries in question from 2006 to 2010. From the three categories, depictions of religious art and architecture are the clear leader for most of the states, followed by people and events and then traditions. The two exceptions to this progression are Poland and Slovenia, both of which issued equal or higher ratios of religious tradition themes. [Figure 7](#) presents one example from each of these three broad categories. Slovenia's stamp depicting a Nativity Wreath is a religious holiday tradition. Slovakia's stamp displays religious artwork and Pope Benedict XVI is a prominent religious figure, depicted here on a stamp from Germany.

## **Conclusion**

As I set out to collect, compare, and analyze Central European stamp issues with religious themes, I expected to find higher ratios of religiously themed stamps in countries with greater collective affinity for religion. In a general sense, this is true for the seven countries in this study, from 2006 to 2010. It is not, however, a particularly strong relationship. I was surprised, initially, to find Czechia and Poland—extreme examples, respectively, of non-religious or religious sentiment—in the middle of the pack ([Table 3](#)) in terms of religious stamp production. However, considering the influence stamps can have as expressions of national identity to both domestic and international consumers ([Brunn 2001](#)), it is not so surprising to see decision makers in Czechia and Poland shy away from issuing what could be considered too few or too many religiously themed postage stamps. People—whether in groups or as individuals—tend to seek understanding and respect, both of which can be difficult to attain by harping on extreme differences.

Production of clearly Catholic and clearly Protestant stamp issues within the scope of the study roughly corresponds with the structure of religious adherents in the respective countries. Countries with higher ratios of Protestants proved more likely to issue clearly Protestant stamps, while countries with dominant Catholic traditions—in particular, Austria and Poland—issued the highest relative numbers of clearly Catholic stamps and very few, if any, clearly Protestant stamps. As the most religiously diverse of the seven countries, Germany and Hungary issued the highest ratios of both Protestant and other-tradition stamps.

Stamp issues depicting examples of living religion along with those that explicitly convey religious holiday messages seem to offer the most potential

as a measure of religiosity, similar to Brunn's (2015) work with stamps and secularization in Western Europe. Further research could examine such stamp issues over a longer period of time to study societal change in Central Europe or other regions of the world.

Another avenue for additional research could consider the way that messages of banal religion in postage stamps are received by members of the societies they are meant to represent. How much of these latent messages remain latent? Do people recognize monuments of religious architecture or masterpieces of religious artwork as being inherently religious or are they merely representative of cultural heritage, specific to a time and place?

These recent stamp issues demonstrate that national identities in Central Europe cannot be entirely or cleanly separated from religion and its far-reaching traditional influences. Much of the initial work to define the Central European nations that are currently represented by political states was accomplished during the nineteenth century. At this time, imagined communities structured around a combination of religious and ethnic identities passed the torch, so to speak, to emerging nations. Consequently, the national identities of Central Europe incorporated, and continue to include, a great deal of religious heritage and tradition. Modern political states in Central Europe continue to communicate banal religion through the issue of national postage stamps.

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# Christian toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia

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## ABSTRACT

What story can place names tell about the significance of religion to national and regional societies? This study explores Christian place names in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, three neighboring countries of Central Europe. Historically, these three nations share predominantly Catholic religious roots. More recently, however, their respective national societies display markedly different attitudes toward religion. Using FamilySearch Places (an online database of place names), the study examines the occurrence and spatial distribution of Christian place names. It considers when these names were initially coined and looks at changes involving Christian place names, since 1900. The research uncovers a number of apparent spatial patterns in Christian toponyms. With few exceptions, the observed name changes were religious to secular in nature.

## KEYWORDS

Central Europe; Christianity; regional identity; religion; toponymy

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## 1. Introduction

Toponymy – the study of place names – can provide unique insights into an area’s history and culture. It demonstrates values and ideologies that were important to local people at the time that a place was named. Like stamps, toponyms can act as messengers of local, regional and national identities, communicating conscious and sub-conscious messages about local populations (Brunn 2011; Reeves 2015). Changes to established place names can also signal significant cultural shifts.

In certain cases, toponyms convey religious meaning and can inform us about the cultural heritage of a given area. Some well-known – and consequently easy-to-overlook – examples include Los Angeles, San Francisco, São Paulo and Saint Petersburg. Each of these toponyms references an important person or concept within Christianity.

Europe in general and Central Europe in particular have a long history of Christian cultural identity. The Empire of Austria-Hungary was closely aligned with Roman Catholicism while, to the north, Prussia’s religious inclinations were split between Protestant and Catholic. In light of this Christian cultural heritage, one might expect to find Christian toponyms in the countries of Central Europe.

This study examines toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. Specifically, it looks at names for permanently inhabited settlements that have a Christian theme. We seek to answer the following questions.

- How often do Christian place names occur in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia?
- What spatial patterns do they present?
- What can they tell us about the people that coined them and the people that they now represent?

In addition to these straightforward questions, we wish to better understand how Christian heritage is reflected in the place names of Central Europe. How much do place names reflect current identities? How much are they a product of cultural heritage?

## 2. Studies in toponymy

Place names have been studied by geographers and others to show both their connection to the landscape and their relationship to the people who designated them. A wide array of toponymic topics have been explored, from the politics of street naming in Nairobi, Kenya (Wanjiru, Matsubara 2016) and Arab Palestinian zones (Azaryahu, Kook 2002) to the distribution of geographically descriptive toponyms found in the northeastern United States (Zelinsky 1955) to the identification of ethnic settlements on maps (Raitz 1973). Toponyms can also be an important tool for developing tourism, as in Tuscany, Italy (Lemmi, Tangheroni n.d.).

Studies of toponymy illustrate facets of cultural identity that are embedded in a place and in the

memory of its local inhabitants, as well as the various processes that result in differentiated geographic patterns of place names. It is to these varying perspectives that we add our religious and historical framework of analysis of place names. Many dimensions are involved in naming a place. Because multiple interests could be competing for recognition of their particular agenda, political issues often come into play (Berg, Vuolteenaho 2009). In particular, renaming places can come with cultural and religious political implications such as in specific case studies in Israel (Cohen, Kliot 1992), Belgrade, Serbia (Rajić 2012), and the United States (Nick 2017).

The meaning of place names themselves and the linguistic markers they include present a highly-nuanced view of the connections between place and language (Radding, Western 2010; David 2011). Along these lines, Nash (Nash 1999) shows the toponymical implications of changing place names, in this case Irish, from one language to another using phonetic spelling. Wilbur Zelinsky (Zelinsky 1997) edited a focus section of *The Professional Geographer* that includes a thoughtful discussion on the historical and cultural significance of names that have become ingrained in the landscapes of the non-Western cultures of the Inupiat Eskimos of Alaska (Fair 1997) and the Canyon de Chelly Navajo in Arizona (Jett 1997).

Many studies consider place names in Central and Eastern Europe. Street names have particular importance in projecting key cultural perceptions to those within and without a given society. For example, with German unification, street naming (keeping old names or changing names) in places such as East Berlin had particular political overtones (Azaryahu 1997). In Bucharest, Romania street naming practices differed during the communist period as compared with the post-Socialist era (Light et al. 2002; Light 2004). Bucher et al. (Bucher et al. 2013) compare street toponyms within the centers of eight regional cities in Slovakia to show how the shares of different types of names vary by city, while Cureleac (Cureleac 2013) analyzes the place naming practices of the Ukrainian minority in an area of Romania. David (David 2011a; David 2011b) uses Central and Eastern European examples to argue for the recognition of a “commemorative” name category for places that were named by political regimes to reinforce their stance and legitimacy.

Additionally, David and Semian (David, Semian 2015) look at toponyms and geographical nicknames that reference other places – Bohemian Manchester, for example – and how these are used in the Czech media. Finally, Semian et al. (Semian et al. 2017) show what the names of local groups in Czechia say about the people that are part of these groups and about the region specifically.

Nash and Simpson (Nash, Simpson 2011) analyze how place names within a language region illustrate ties between a particular people and the land that can continue for generations. This is certainly the

case with religious toponyms that show how early inhabitants of a place demarcated their devotion to a higher power. Consequently, religious toponyms are easily found throughout the many cultural regions of the world.

Numerous studies explore the relationship between religion and place names. This process can be seen with church toponyms in cities such as Chicago or New Orleans, where names differed markedly between African American and “White Euro-American” places of worship (Fairclough 1960; Zelinsky 2002). In a broader context, names of churches can also tell much about the religious makeup of the underlying population such as with Lutheran (Ferguson 1966), Catholic (Stump 1986), and Eastern Rite Roman Catholic (Stump 1988) churches in the United States. Additionally, in terms of place names, rather than simply looking at the naming of churches themselves, Brunn and Wheeler (Brunn, Wheeler 1966) highlight the fascinating and diverse set of religious toponyms found across the United States.

Gazetteers, atlases, and other place compendiums about our study area can also be valuable resources. These include general place name guides (Room 1997; Everett-Heath 2000) that can give one a flavor of the types and ranges of names around the world and region. Atlases help one locate these places and show their historical development and spatial proximity (Demart 2011; Polska Akademia 1973; Kartografické nakladatelství 1968). A postal guide of Poland (Kay 1992), a study of German towns in Slovakia (Gardiner 1988), and an old explanation and classification of Polish place names (Ehrlich 1915) can also prove helpful. Finally, official gazetteers and dictionaries stand as important references for locations and historical snapshots of places that existed at certain points of time (US Board on Geographic Names 1955; US Board on Geographic Names 1988; Słownik geograficzny 1880–1914).

On the whole, these studies show how toponyms are indicative of cultural identity at various spatial scales. They underscore how place names have a distinct societal importance among a wide range of peoples in various parts of the world (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010). We highlight the cultural and geographic importance of toponyms in this comparison of religious – and specifically Christian – place names in Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia.

### 3. Methods

This study employs both national and regional scale levels to examine the toponyms of Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. It uses FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016), a large collection of modern and historic place descriptions maintained for the intent of helping people describe their family history, to identify occurrences of Christian toponyms in the three

countries. In addition to this comprehensive dictionary of toponyms, the study relies on specific and more localized sources to examine a subset of Christian toponyms in select model regions. These sources include Wikipedia articles, historical information or visual presentations available on official municipal websites and detailed toponymic dictionaries for the countries in question (Czech Statistical Office 2006; Hosák, Šrámek 1967–1980; Majtán 1998; Profous 1947–1960; Rymut 1987).

As the title indicates, our intent is to study Christian toponyms. We define a Christian toponym as a place name that refers to a Christian theme. These references to Christianity can be readily apparent, for example *Jerusalem* or *Svatý Jan* [Saint John], or they may require more knowledge concerning a given toponym’s origin and meaning. This is where we turned to the in-depth sources listed above.

At the national scale, we used FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016), to search each of the three countries for any “populated places” – a group of types that includes cities, towns, villages, municipalities and other permanently inhabited settlements – that have certain key Christian terms in their name. We conducted searches for names referencing Mary (i.e. the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ) as well as place names including the word “holy/saint”. The name Mary is rendered as Maria in each of the three native languages, so the search string was simply “Mari\*” with the asterisk acting as a wildcard for any number of characters. Because Slavic languages, in this case Czech, Polish and Slovak, utilize noun declinations, our search queries needed to account for a variety of possible endings. The three languages use a word that can be translated into English as either “holy” (as in Holy Ghost) or “saint” (as in Saint Mark). In both Czech and Slovak, the search string for holy/saint is “Svat\*”. In Polish, the string is “Święt\*”. FamilySearch Place’s search function is inclusive of all diacritics, so it brings back all results with Svätý (Slovak) or Święty (Polish) and their various derivatives.

Every known location described in FamilySearch Places can have multiple “place representations”. Place representations describe the same place at a different point in its history. They can describe a period when a place was known by a different name or when it belonged within a different political jurisdiction, among other possibilities. To make sure our search results were describing unique places we removed any place representations that described the same logical place from our counts of Christian toponyms. In this way, we represented each place once and only once. This same database feature also helped us to identify name changes over time, which we explore later in the study.

In addition to this country-level view, we wished to examine a sampling of areas within the three countries in greater detail. We selected two districts (okres in Czechia and Slovakia, powiat in Polish) from each

of the three countries. We examined all unique names for inhabited settlements and flagged any that had a potentially Christian theme. After this initial pass, we conducted in-depth research to determine whether the toponyms in question had a verifiable Christian theme. A village could be called *Janov*, for example, simply because a prominent landowner bore the name Jan. On the other hand, the village could be home to a chapel, church or pilgrimage dedicated to Saint John.

A number of common given names have clear roots in Christianity. John (Jan in Slavic languages), James (Jakub), Peter and Paul (Pavel or Pawel), for example, show up rather frequently among the toponyms of the districts we examined. And while use of such a name, regardless of its intended meaning, can still demonstrate a relationship to Christianity, we chose to focus on toponyms that bear a more directly verifiable Christian meaning. Any time we came across one of these Christian given names as a toponym in the model districts, we checked local parish churches, smaller chapels and pilgrimage traditions for use of the same saint's name. If we found a church, chapel or pilgrimage dedicated to the saint in question or

historical information that described said saint as the source of the toponym, we regarded it as a Christian toponym. Otherwise, it was removed from our list and not included in further qualitative analysis.

In the case of the Slovak districts, we realized after we had begun researching and comparing places that district borders have changed significantly over the last fifty years. We chose to use the borders of the so-called "large" districts that were valid from 1960 to 1996. This means that Trnava District also includes the present-day Piešťany and Hlohovec Districts and the Prešov District includes the area now in Sabinov District. Even with this broader historic boundary description, Slovakia's large districts contain fewer settlements than the model districts in Czechia or Poland. In similar fashion, we adhere to the boundaries of Žďár nad Sázavou District as they were before 2005, when a number of municipalities along its eastern border were reassigned to Brno-venkov.

We selected districts that would represent different regions of the three countries and intentionally avoided districts located along international borders. This decision helps the study to focus on the countries' historic core and avoid some of the unique

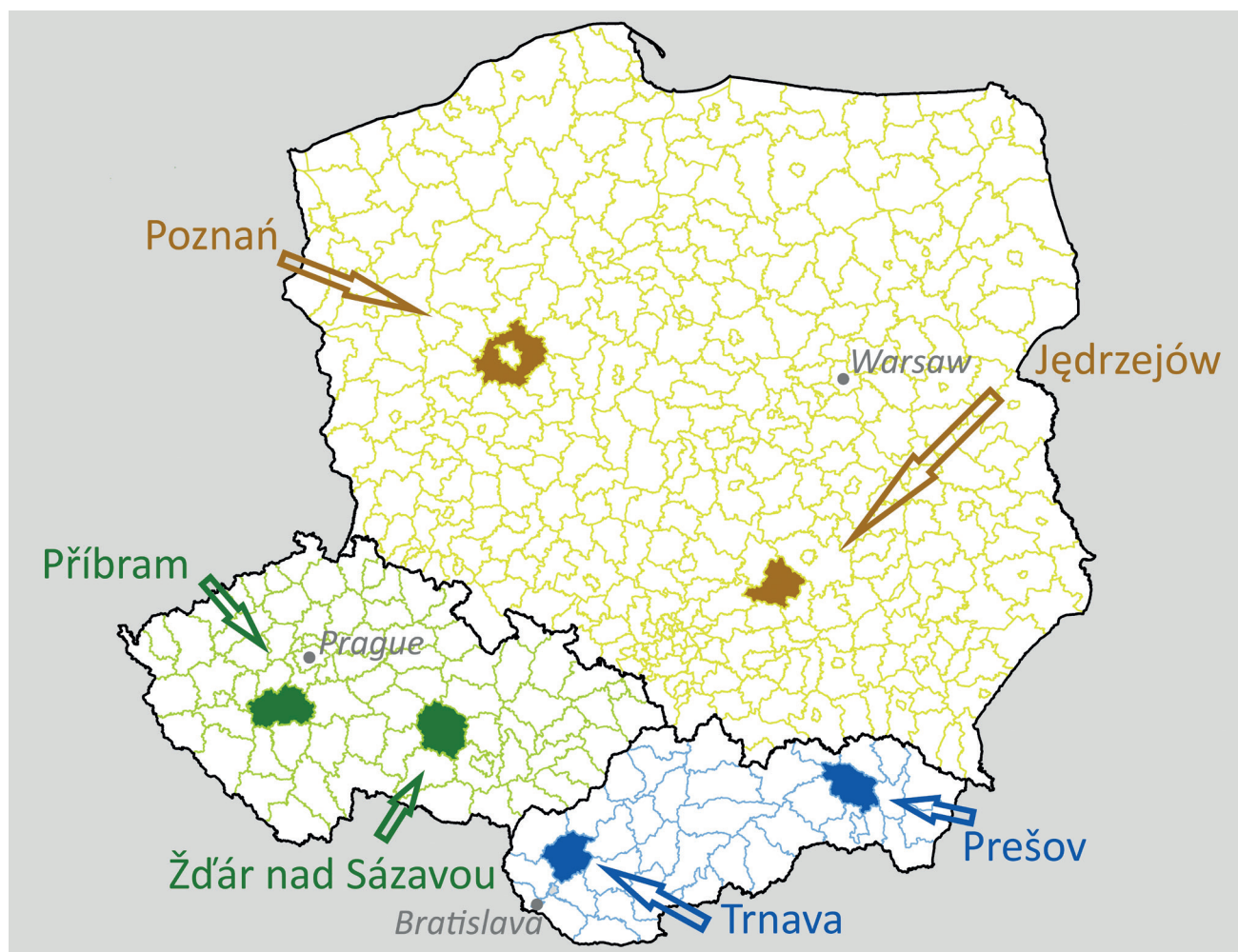


Fig. 1 Model districts examined in the study.



circumstances of border regions. Figure 1 shows the six model districts. In Czechia, they are Příbram and Žďár nad Sazavou; in Slovakia, Trnava and Prešov and in Poland, Poznań and Jędrzejów.

After collecting and counting instances of Christian toponyms in the six model districts, we took a closer look at the place names themselves. This qualitative analysis enables us to identify and describe a number of categories. It also allows us to highlight unique names, examine their meanings and recognize spatial patterns.

4. Findings

4.1 National comparisons

When we conducted the queries for this research project, FamilySearch Places included descriptions for 16,462 settlements in Czechia; 4842 in Slovakia and 50,380 in Poland (FamilySearch 2016). Normalized against these totals, country-wide queries for Christian-themed place names show differences among the three countries. Table 1 describes both the raw numbers of Christian toponyms, searched at the country level, as well as their relative frequencies. Mary place names are more common in Poland than in Czechia or Slovakia, while the opposite is true of Holy/Saint place names. Slovakia’s relative frequency of Holy/

Saint toponyms stands out in this comparison, reaching nearly one percent (0.93%) of all place names in the country.

Figure 2 graphically portrays the prevalence of these two particular cases of Christian toponyms in the three countries. The lower percentages – describing Mary toponyms in Czechia and Slovakia and Holy/Saint toponyms in Poland – are quite similar.

Figure 3 and 4 present the overall numbers and geographic distribution of Christian toponyms resulting from these queries. Mary place names, as shown in Figure 3, are more frequent in Poland. And within Poland they show a thicker concentration centered south and east of the country’s present-day geographic center. This spatial pattern is reminiscent of Poland’s pre-World War II territorial extent and suggests that place names incorporating the name Mary were not used as frequently by the German speaking inhabitants of what is now western and southwestern Poland (Pomerania in the northwest, Silesia in the southwest). This German cultural area tended to identify with Lutheranism more than with Catholicism and would, therefore, be a less likely location for observing toponyms honoring the Virgin Mary.

The Holy/Saint place names – depicted in Figure 4 – are more common in Czechia and Slovakia, particularly considering the overall numbers of settlements in the three countries (see Tab. 1 and Fig. 4). Within Czechia these place names occur with greater frequency in Bohemia (the western two-thirds of the country) and even more specifically along the German and Austrian borders of southern Bohemia. Central Slovakia is home to two distinctive clusters of Holy/Saint toponyms in the Liptov and the Turiec regions. The Turiec region, with its central city Martin, is often viewed as a cradle of Slovakia’s language and culture, perhaps signaling a greater cultural significance in the place naming patterns employed there.

Historically, Martin was known as *Svätý Martin* or *Turčiansky Svätý Martin* [Saint Martin or Turiec Saint Martin], while Liptovský Mikuláš – the largest town in the Liptov region – was called *Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš* [Liptov Saint Nicholas]. In both cases, the word *saint* [Svätý] was removed from the toponym, resulting in a more secular place name.

These are two examples of a broader trend during the twentieth century towards more secular place

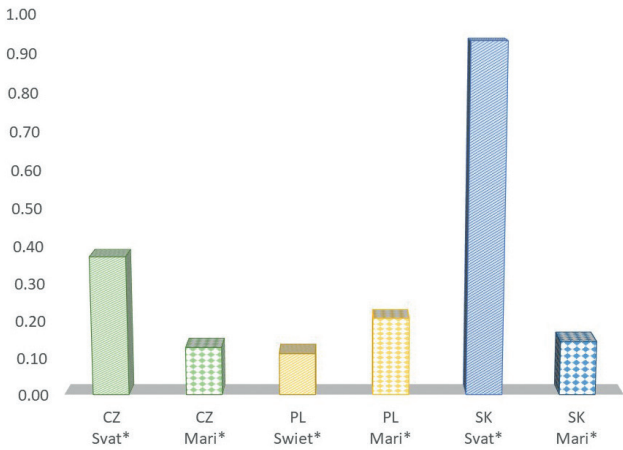


Fig. 2 Holy/Saint and Mary toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia as a percentage of total settlement names.

Tab. 1 Country-level queries in FamilySearch Places, numbers and relative frequencies of toponyms beginning with Saint/Holy [Svat\* or Swiet\*] or Mary [Mari\*].

Country	Czechia		Poland		Slovakia	
Search string	Svat*	Mari*	Swiet*	Mari*	Svat*	Mari*
Matching place names	61	21	56	104	45	7
Total number of settlements	16462		50380		4842	
Percentages	0.37	0.13	0.11	0.21	0.93	0.14

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016)

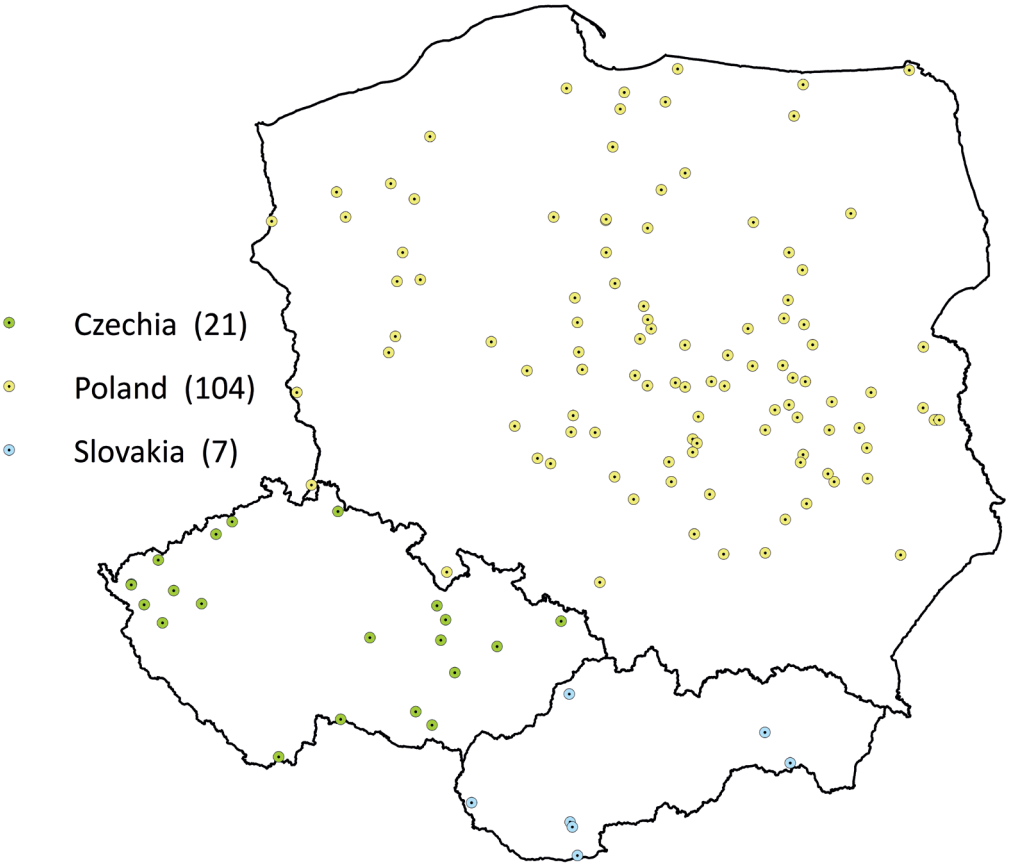


Fig. 3 Spatial distribution of Mary toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.

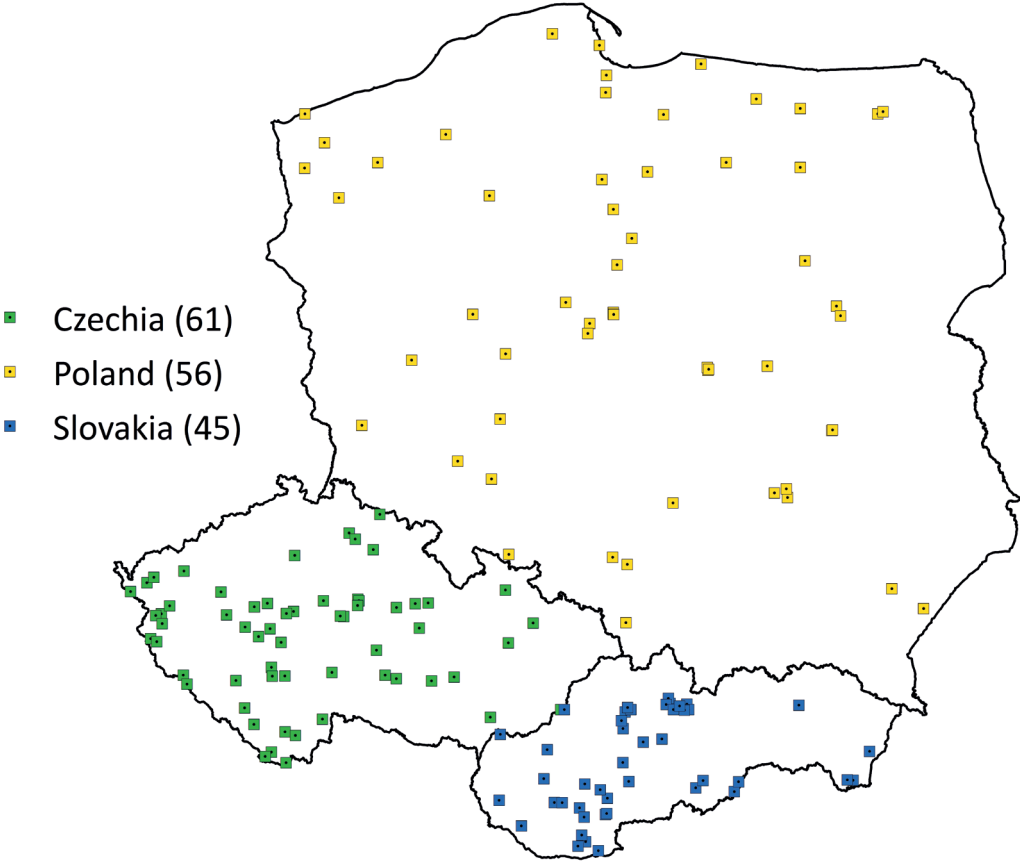


Fig. 4 Spatial distribution of Holy/Saint toponyms in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.



names. While it is still clear to those familiar with these places that the names reference St. Martin or St. Nicholas, the toponyms are less overtly Christian now than they were one hundred years ago. Martin took on its present shortened name in 1951 and Liptovský Mikuláš lost its “saintliness” in 1952.

These name changes were forced upon local communities by Czechoslovakia’s communist regime, which sought to reduce the significance of religion in the daily lives of its citizens. The town of Svätý Jur, in southwestern Slovakia, is a well-documented example of this larger trend: “During the socialist period the name Svätý Jur, considered to be politically inappropriate, had to be changed to the more neutral Jur pri Bratislave. After the [Velvet] revolution the town quickly returned to its original name” (Filip 2013: <http://omestach.sk/svatyjur/svatyjur.html>; translation by authors).

As these examples demonstrate, each toponym has its own unique story. And while some trends can be observed at the country level, it is necessary to move closer to the toponyms themselves, i.e. to the regional and local levels, to more clearly view the picture they are painting.

4.2 Regional comparisons

Figure 5 portrays the relative frequency of Christian toponyms within the six model districts described above (see Figure 1) while Table 2 provides a more

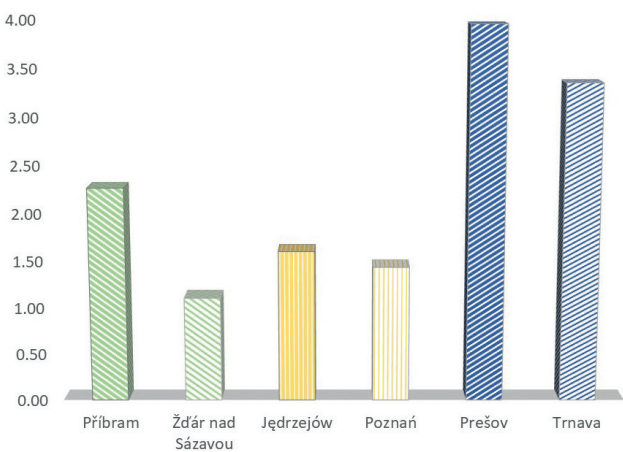


Fig. 5 Christian-themed toponyms as a percentage of total settlement names in the six model districts.

detailed breakdown of the numbers. The two Slovak districts Prešov and Trnava show the highest ratios with more than three percent of their settlements paying nominal homage to Christianity. Příbram, one of two Czech districts, is home to nine Christian toponyms that account for approximately two percent (2.27%) of its settlements. Poland’s two districts come next – in descending order – with percentages close to one and a half. Jędrzejów is slightly higher (1.6%) and Poznań slightly lower (1.43%). Žďár nad Sázavou, Czechia’s second district in the study, displays the lowest percentage (1.1%) of Christian place names from the six model districts.

In recent decades, the inhabitants of Moravia have identified much more with Christianity than the people of Bohemia (Havlíček et al. 2009). This trend is not in line with the higher ratio of Christian toponyms in Příbram – a district within Bohemia – as compared to Žďár nad Sázavou – in Moravia. However, the fact that the toponyms in question originated several hundred years ago, during a period when Christianity was the dominant religious and political player in both Bohemia and Moravia makes this result appear less of an anomaly. Příbram District is also home to a regionally significant pilgrimage site, Svatá Hora, and a pair of toponyms honoring the Czech Brethren. These observations could cause Příbram to exhibit a slightly higher ratio of Christian toponyms than the average for all of Bohemia.

Žďár nad Sázavou District had 20 toponyms based on a given name with apparent Christian origins and initially appeared to have an abundance of Christian-themed place names. However, in-depth investigation affirmed that all but three of these toponyms are derived from the name of an early settler/land owner and have little to do with Christianity. The remaining Christian toponym (one not based upon a Christian, given name) in Žďár nad Sázavou, Křížovice, references the cross and a nearby church dedicated to the Holy Cross [Kostel Povýšení svatého Kříže] (Wikipedia [https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kostel\\_Povýšení\\_svatého\\_Kříže\\_\(Dobruška\)](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kostel_Povýšení_svatého_Kříže_(Dobruška))).

Any remaining toponyms (see Tables 3, 4 and 5) based on the given names of important figures in Christianity had to meet stricter criteria to be considered Christian. The village or town needed to include a chapel or church dedicated to the Saint referenced

Tab. 2 Christian toponyms in the model districts, raw numbers and relative frequencies.

Country	Czechia		Poland		Slovakia	
District	Příbram	Žďár nad Sázavou	Jędrzejów	Poznań	Prešov	Trnava
Christian place names:	9	4	4	5	7	5
Total number of settlements:	397	363	250	349	177	149
Percentages	2.27	1.10	1.60	1.43	3.95	3.36

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors’ calculations

in the toponym, or there needed to be evidence of a local pilgrimage honoring the Saint in question, or historical documents or community symbols needed to reference the Saint as the source of the toponym. Martinice in Žďár nad Sázavou District, for example, continues to honor Saint Martin with a traditional lantern celebration every November (Nedělková 2017).

Close examination of the specific instances of Christian toponyms found in the six selected districts provides an opportunity to recognize and describe categories and patterns. It also enables us to take a closer look at some unique place names. Tables 3, 4 and 5 list the Christian toponyms that we identified in each of the six districts. We have organized these

**Tab. 3** Christian toponyms from two districts in Czechia.

Czechia		
Příbram	English explanation	Žďár nad Sázavou
Bratřejov	Bratr – Brother (referencing Czech Brethren)	
Bratřkovice		
Křížov	Kříž – cross	Křížovice
Daleké Dušníky	Dušník – fuedal property directly supporting a church	
	Cyríl – Saint Cyril	Cyrílov
Jerusalem		
	Martin – Saint Martin	Martinice
	Matěj – Saint Matthew	Matějov
Svatá Hora	Svatá Hora – holy mountain	
Svaté Pole	Svaté Pole – holy fields	
Svatý Jan	Svatý Jan – Saint John	
Petrovice	Petr – Saint Peter	

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors' translations

Note: Pay attention to the justification of information in the English explanation column. Right justified indicates that the explanation pertains to a toponym or toponyms described in the right column. Left justified denotes an explanation of the left column. Explanations that are centered within the center column refer to toponyms on both sides.

**Tab. 4** Christian toponyms from two districts in Poland.

Poland		
Jędrzejów	English explanation	Poznań
Kościelna Górka	Biskup – Bishop	Biskupice
Mnichów	Kościel – church	Ceradz Kościelny
Mniszek	Krzyżownik – crusader	Krzyżowniki
Pawłowice	Mnich/Mnisz – monk	Krzyżowniki
	Paweł/Pawł – Saint Paul	
	Łazarz – Saint Lazarus	Łazarz

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors' translations

Note: Pay attention to the justification of information in the English explanation column. Right justified indicates that the explanation pertains to a toponym or toponyms described in the right column. Left justified denotes an explanation of the left column. Explanations that are centered within the center column refer to toponyms on both sides.

**Tab. 5** Christian toponyms from two districts in Slovakia.

Slovakia		
Prešov	English explanation	Trnava
Janovík	Jan/Janov – Saint John	
Křížovany	Kříž – cross	Křížovany nad Dudváhom
Ondrašovce	Ondra – Saint Andrew	
Petrovany	Peter/Petr – Saint Peter	
	Kostol – church	Svätý Peter pri Váhu
Prameň Salvator	Salvator – Savior	Veľké Kostoľany
Šarišské Michal'any	Michal' – Saint Michael	Zákostolany
Svätý Jur	Svätý Jur – Saint George	Biely Kostol

Source: FamilySearch Places (FamilySearch 2016); Authors' translations.

Note: Pay attention to the justification of information in the English explanation column. Right justified indicates that the explanation pertains to a toponym or toponyms described in the right column. Left justified denotes an explanation of the left column. Explanations that are centered within the center column refer to toponyms on both sides.

by country, with Table 3 presenting the two Czech districts, Table 4 the Polish districts and Table 5 the Slovak districts. The wide column in the middle of each of these tables provides an English explanation of the religious elements of the various toponyms. We have reduced some of the redundancy of these English explanations by sorting duplicates within the same district and lining up duplicates within the same country. English explanations that are aligned to the right of the center column apply only to toponyms in the district on the right of the chart, while explanations aligned to the left apply only to the district on the left. English explanations centered in this middle column describe place names in both districts.

Several of these toponyms invoke the name of a recognized saint – in a Catholic/Protestant sense. These include the names of some of Jesus Christ's apostles, for example Andrew, John, Mathew, Peter and Paul [Ondra, Jan, Matěj, Petr and Paweł]. ... a number of regionally important saints: Cyril, George [Jur], and Lazarus [Łazarz], Martin and Michael [Michał]. Other observed Christian toponyms do not reference a historical figure. Instead they focus on deity, an institution or a symbol. Examples include the cross or crusaders [Kříž, Krzyżownik], monks [Mnich, Mniszek], bishop [Biskup] or the word church [Kostol, Kościel].

Not surprisingly, place naming practices show strong regional correlation. Toponyms referencing crusaders, for example, are only found in Poznań District, where there are two. Place names using the word church [kostol/kościel] are found in Trnava District, where there are three, and once each in the Polish districts. They are not present in the remaining three districts. Příbram District contains the only toponyms that describe things – fields and a mountain – with an adjective as holy, as well as the only references to the Czech Brethren. In both cases, there are two such names. It appears that principles of innovation and diffusion apply to toponyms. Well-liked place names are contagious.

While gathering information about Jędrzejów District and the places within it, we learned about Świętokrzyskie Province (or Voivodeship), of which Jędrzejów is a part. The province's name Świętokrzyskie means Holy Cross. Although information about the province describes it being named for the Świętokrzyskie Mountains that it contains; its website, coat-of-arms and official logos demonstrate a clear connection to Christian symbols. The province was created quite recently, in 1999, as part of large-scale administrative reforms. The selection of a Christian toponym with its associated symbols in the context of recent political action demonstrates the ongoing significance of Christianity to the people of southeastern Poland.

### 4.3 Temporal comparisons

To document changes in Christian toponyms over time, we employed a series of military maps compiled

by Austria-Hungary between 1900 and World War I (Austria-Hungary 1900–1914). We closely examined the entire territory of each of the six model districts and searched for Christian toponyms. In the process, we checked on the place names we were already researching (Tables 3, 4 and 5) to investigate whether they had changed during the last hundred years. We then looked at modern maps, using both OpenStreetMap and Google Maps, to determine whether the remaining Christian toponyms found on the old Austria-Hungary maps describe a settlement that still exists under a different name or whether these communities and toponyms have disappeared from the map entirely.

Changes involving Christian place names were rare in the model districts, comparing one hundred years ago with the present. In Czechia, we only recorded one change from a Christian toponym to a name that is not recognizable as Christian. The village of Kocanda in Žďár nad Sázavou District is shown on the old Austria-Hungary maps under its historic, German name Gottseida, in which the word God (Gott in German) is evident. While the Czech and German names are phonetically similar, they do not share the same meaning. The Czech name does not imply anything Christian.

Poland's model districts include three Christian toponyms that were altered in some way after 1900. Two of these places appear to be deserted settlements, as neither modern maps nor satellite images give any indication of their existence. The third, a village in Poznań District, changed from Święty Łazarz [St. Lazarus] to Łazarz losing the descriptive *Saint* from the toponym. Although the meaning remains, the modern and shortened name is less overtly Christian than it was a century ago.

Slovakia provides three more examples of place names becoming more secular, at some point during the last hundred years. The old Austria-Hungary maps show three villages in the Prešov District Szentmihályfalva, Tarczaszentpéter, Szentesdubrava that are now known as Šarišské Michaľany, Petrovany and Dubrava, respectively. Each of these villages lost the descriptor *szent* [saint] from their name. (We should point out that these three historic toponyms and the word *szent* are Hungarian and not Slovak. The Austria-Hungary military maps commonly employed Hungarian names to describe places in what is now Slovakia.) Of these three toponyms, two of them became less overtly Christian while the third no longer has a Christian element. The third toponym Dubrava is derived from words meaning a grove of oak trees. We could, therefore, translate it – before and after the change – as “Holy Oak Grove” and “Oak Grove”.

To summarize the observed changes over the last hundred years in the model districts: two toponyms changed from being recognizably Christian in nature to conveying no Christian meaning, three toponyms are less overtly Christian than they were and two settlements that had Christian toponyms have been

abandoned and no longer appear on modern maps. We observed no new Christian toponyms in the model districts; nor did we find cases of toponyms changing to more openly convey Christian meaning.

## 5. Conclusion

Toponyms are a feature of the cultural landscape that can be read and studied by those wishing to pay attention. Back in 1955, well-known cultural geographer Wilbur Zelinsky issued the following call to action:

"Most urgent is the need for a series of careful studies of the toponymy of a selected group of communities that will include generic terms, specific names, and vernacular topographic language and will treat these subjects in their full geographic and historic context" (Zelinsky 1955: 349).

Though this study focuses on a specific subset of place names, i.e. Christian place names, it does answer Zelinsky's call for "careful studies of ... toponymy".

Czechia, Poland and Slovakia are home to many Christian toponyms, though they comprise a fairly small percentage of all toponyms in these countries. Slovakia proved to have the greatest relative frequency of such names. Czechia and Poland show similar frequencies at both the national and regional scales. Czechia, however, is rather diverse at the regional level. Bohemia appears to have more Christian toponyms while the representative district from Moravia ranks lowest of all the model districts. This particular result is a reversal of recent statistics and studies that depict Moravia as more Christian than Bohemia (Havlíček et al. 2009). Further research could shed additional light on differences in the prevalence and typology of Christian toponyms in Bohemia and Moravia.

Comparisons at the regional level, including changes over time, allowed us to take a more qualitative approach. Close examination of the Christian toponyms in six model districts uncovered a number of regionally significant patterns. Areas near regional borders, for example, sometimes affix regional descriptors to otherwise Christian toponyms, as in the Czech and Slovak model districts. Ideas are often contagious and Christian toponyms prove to be no exception. Some of the more unique names or name types were used multiple times in a single region, but appeared in none (or few) of the other model districts. In terms of changes to place names over the last hundred years, we observed several changes towards more secular toponyms, but also a pair of changes in the other direction; a new Christian toponym for a Polish province and a return to a traditional and Christian name for a Slovak town.

Toponymy presents many opportunities for further research, from viewing name changes over time in their historical context, to examining cultural impacts of imperialism, to investigating regional marketing.

The recent de-communization of place names in Ukraine provides an example of top-down, politically driven events that can impact people's sense of local identity (MacFarquhar 2015). Rather than simply focus on contested space, in such a situation political geographers may wish to explore contested toponyms.

Toponymy proved to be a viable way to explore religious heritage. It depicts cultural elements that were important to local communities at the time that places were named. Czechia, Poland and Slovakia clearly have strong cultural roots in Christianity and this is reflected in their toponymic landscape.

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# Chapter 115

## Secularization and Church Property: The Case of Czechia

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### 115.1 Introduction

The mutual interaction of political and religious (church) power plays a significant role in the development of every society along with the territories associated with each given society. Church-state relationships have undergone numerous changes in recent years, depending on the type of political power being wielded and the various types of religion involved (Geyer 2004; Madeley 2003). Madeley (2003) explores church-state relationships in Europe and distinguishes three broad belts: the historic mono-confessional culture belt, the historic Northwest-Southeast multi-confessional culture belt and the historic Northeast-Southeast multi-confessional culture belt. He places Czechia in the NW-SE multi-confessional belt, which is characterized by a very low number of inhabitants without any church affiliation (that is, non-denominationalists). Current figures on the portion of non-believers in Czechia, which is nearly 60 %, demonstrate that, in comparison with its neighboring states, Czechia exhibits a very unique position in terms of religiosity. The role of religion in society is significantly less than that found in other European states. When considering church-state relations, it is clear that the state controls a much more dominant position of influence over society and space than other countries (Havlíček 2006).

Currently no official declaration mandating the separation of church and state has been made in Czechia, as has been done in other countries of Europe. Nonetheless, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms in the Constitution of the Czech Republic proclaims that the state is founded on democratic principles and may not be bound to exclusive ideologies or religious denominations. Consequently, the salaries of the clergy of most of the churches are paid from the

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national budget, as set forth in the Act on Financial Provisions by the State for Churches and Religious Societies (Karlová 2011).

Since the beginning of the millennium, an evident trend is towards greater secularization and a more dominant role of profane culture, both which have become increasingly evident in Czech society. From 1991 to 2001, the portion of inhabitants declaring no religious affiliation increased from 39.9 % (1991) to 58.2 % (2001). The lower numbers in 1991 can, in part, be attributed to a short-lived period of societal openness to spiritual phenomena, immediately following the fall of the communist regime. Generally speaking, Czechia's religious landscape is increasingly diversified and secularization is on the rise (Havlíček et al. 2009). The larger churches are losing adherents, while smaller groups, particularly small Christian communities, are gaining members (Havlíček 2005). Czech society's tendencies towards secularization, over the past 20 years, are clearly reflected in the issue of the restitution of church properties seized during the communist era.

Over the course of their existence, religious institutions acquired property – for the most part real estate – that was used for worship services and related purposes. Incidentally, by managing and utilizing this property, churches were self-sufficient in day-to-day, practical matters. With increasing secularization of European, or Czech society, the role of religious institutions has decreased, along with the extent of their property and, consequently, the impact of said properties as symbols in the religious landscape. During the past 50 years, the uses of many religious structures and church-owned real estate changed from religious to non-religious purposes (Knippenberg 2005). The uses of some church properties also changed as a result of political changes, particularly due to the emergence of authoritative (primarily communist) regimes. These dictatorships viewed religious institutions as an obstacle impeding the process of controlling and manipulating a society. They tried to limit freedoms of speech and assembly, in part, by seeking to control or, more directly, seize church-owned property, thereby weakening churches' role in society.

This situation arose during the Cold War (1948–1989) in the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. A large portion of church properties was either entirely or partially seized/controlled by the centralized communist governments. Churches became economically and proprietarily dependent on the state (Havlíček 2006). In addition, because of property losses, churches were no longer able to effectively participate in educational, health or social-welfare systems.

After the fall of the communist dictatorships, attempts to return formerly church-owned properties seized by the state to their previous owners began in the hopes of achieving a full restitution of properties and resolving disrupted church-state relations. And yet in Czechia, more than 20 years after the fall of the communist regime, the majority of previously church-owned properties remain unresolved. Most churches continue to be dependent on the state, because legislative conditions for the proprietary and financial separation of church and state have not been agreed upon or enforced. At present (May 2012), a new draft of the Act on Property Restitution has been prepared and the issue continues to be a subject of frequent discussion and media coverage. Optimistic views regarding this draft being approved and entering into force are, however, disrupted by the current political crisis.

The opening paragraph of the drafted legislation on property restitution presents a number of reasons, from the state's perspective, that property restitution should be carried out. The language reads:

Parliament, remembering the painful experiences of periods when human rights and basic freedoms were suppressed in the territory of the present-day Czech Republic; determined to protect and develop our inherited cultural and spiritual wealth; led by attempts to mitigate the consequences of certain property-related and other grievances, perpetrated by the communist regime during the period from 1948 to 1989, to settle property relations between the state and churches or religious societies, as a prerequisite to complete religious freedom, thereby enabling the restoration of the proprietary holdings/resources of churches and religious societies, the free and independent status of churches and religious societies, whose existence and works it considers to be an essential element of a democratic society... (Governmental draft of a bill 2012: 1)

The objective of this chapter is to evaluate the process of returning church properties seized during Czechia's communist era as a reflection of continually developing church-state relations in post-1989, secularized Czech society. We will analyze mutual discussion on the topic and the priorities of the issues among various stakeholders, including the general public. Based on the generally low degree of religiosity in Czechia, we expect that the secularized public will exhibit insufficient interest in returning church properties to the churches which will, in turn, impact political decisions on the issue. Considering the block (limits to utilization) placed on formerly church-owned properties, we expect the effects of unresolved church-state relations to express themselves, even in local and regional development, and that the impacted stakeholders (local and regional governments who are key participants in regional development and business people) will play a significant role in the process.

## **115.2 Church-State Relations in Czechia in the Context of Central Europe**

### ***115.2.1 Restitution of Church Properties in Central Europe***

Although the Czech examples presented herein are somewhat extreme in nature, the restitution of church-owned property seized by communist regimes is not unique to Czechia. It is a difficult political issue that has been forced upon all of Central and Eastern Europe's post-communist governments. There seem to be at least as many approaches to resolving church-owned properties as there are political states involved. According to a report issued by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission), as of 16 July 2002, the majority of communal (church-owned) properties had been returned in most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia were presented as examples of states that had enacted or were in the process of enacting effective laws to restore previously confiscated

properties (CSCE 2002). On the other hand, this hearing gave “a particular focus on claims in Poland, the Czech Republic [sic], and Romania,” in effect, proclaiming that these three countries left much to be desired in terms of property restitution (Walsh 2002).

The official transcript from this 2002 hearing makes it clear that Poland’s shortcomings in property restitution dealt primarily with private property, particularly the losses of Holocaust victims (CSCE 2002). In Romania, problems with property restitution stemmed from the confusing and excessive administrative requirements necessary for filing claims as well as from allegations of discrimination in the return of communal property, mainly against the Greek Catholic Church. Nonetheless, significant progress towards the restitution of seized communal properties, both in Poland and Romania, had been made by the time of this hearing. While Czechia also exhibited shortcomings concerning the restitution of private property, of more significance to the topic at hand, even 10 years ago (in 2002), was the absence of legal mechanisms to govern the return of communal properties.

A follow-up briefing held by the U.S. Helsinki Commission in 2003 praised the efforts of Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgaria, countries that were nearing complete restitution of seized properties. Once again, however, the commission criticized a continuing lack of progress in Czechia, Poland and Romania, this time adding Serbia to their blacklist. We should reiterate here that, as an American political advisory body, this committee’s focus was on personal claims and the majority of previously church-owned properties in Poland were resolved relatively smoothly, by 1995, with the exception of a number of Jewish claims (Pogany 1997).

Pogany (1997) points out a number of issues surrounding the return of Church-owned properties in Central and Eastern Europe, focusing in particular on his native Hungary. He explains parts of the complicated process claimants must navigate to request the restitution of property and explores some of the reasons today’s society is, in many cases, not supportive of a complete return to former ownership conditions. For example, the city of Sopron near Hungary’s western border has a secondary school that, in the 1940s, was owned and operated by a German Protestant church. At that time, nearly half of the town’s population was comprised of ethnic Germans, many of whom were Protestants. As in Czechia, Slovakia and Poland, a large portion of Hungary’s *Volksdeutsche* were forced to emigrate following World War II, leaving Sopron with a very different social and cultural composition today. In spite of local government support for its restitution, a Protestant “Gimnázium in Sopron could no longer be justified by reference to the current needs, or even wishes, of a substantial portion of the local population” (Pogany 1997: 194).

Generally speaking, it is clear that the restitution of previously church-owned properties in Central Europe has been and continues to be, at least for Czechia, a very tricky issue. In spite of the correctness and fairness of a complete return of these properties, even coupled with the good will and favorable intentions of political leaders, it is a difficult sell to a public that has changed drastically over 40 years of communist rule and – as the process drags on – more than 20 years of post-socialist globalization (Broun 1996).

### ***115.2.2 Historical Aspects of Church-State Relations in Czechia***

Throughout Czech history sacred and profane, or worldly, powers have been closely connected. This mutual connectivity and influence has led to many conflicts. Religion, more specifically, Christianity, played a decisive role in the initial process of creating a political state on the territory of present-day Czechia. For some time, beginning in the tenth century, Czechia found itself situated along the ideological divide between Eastern Orthodox and western, Roman-Catholic influences. Eventually, the Western influence of the Mainz Bishopric increased, giving the Catholic Church decisive power in the area. A very early phase of the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church began here with Jan Hus, who was both a preacher in Prague and rector of Charles University. After Hus' execution by fire, this phase culminated, during the first half of the fifteenth century, in the Hussite Wars and other local reformation efforts. This conflict led to increasing separation of the church from state powers. During the period of broader European reformation, the Czech lands fell increasingly under the influence of Protestant movements and churches that were connected with regional political forces. Protestant churches' attempts to take control of political power in the Czech lands were, in the end, suppressed by the Hapsburgs' strong anti-Reformation movement, following the Battle of Bílá Hora (White Mountain; in 1620). Religions other than Catholicism were forbidden Hapsburg rulers and, eventually, non-Catholic religious communities were made illegal by the state. This step led to the emigration of Protestants or to their Catholicization during the baroque (counter Reformation) period, which, incidentally, also involved the construction of numerous sacred symbols in the landscape (wayside shrines, chapels and crosses).

The creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 brought about the separation of state and church (primarily Roman Catholic) power. At the same time, the "state" Czechoslovak Hussite Church was established after the pattern of the Anglican Church in Great Britain. By the beginning of World War II, members of this church comprised more than 10 % of Czechia's population. After this point, there was a gradual decrease in the number of adherents of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church. At present only 1 % of the population claims membership in this "state" church (Havlíček 2006).

During the twentieth century, two separate political dictatorships (Nazism and communism) led to significant state restrictions limiting the operations and freedoms of church institutions. State power even assumed certain aspects of religious thinking and behavior in its ideologically charged discourses. So-called political religion (Mayr 1995) emerged, founded on ideologies taken from existing religious structures, which were, at the same time, strictly suppressed. Practically all religious orders were disbanded and many monks and priests were incarcerated. Until 1989 the Czechoslovak constitution included a provision, proclaiming the need to eliminate religion – an anachronism from an exploitive society – from people's consciousness.

During the period of communist rule, the state limited and regulated church operations. The fall of the communism in Europe and in Czechia, Czechoslovakia, brought a renewal of religious freedom and renewed separation of church and state powers. Under the communist regime, the state confiscated a large amount of church-owned properties (3 % of Czechia's land area) and this property is yet to be returned to the churches. The state continues to partially finance the operations of the various churches (contributing, for example, to clergy salaries). However, it no longer interferes in internal church structures. It merely formulates the basic framework conditions that shape church-state relations.

## **115.3 Negotiations for the Restitution of Church Properties After 1989**

### ***115.3.1 Negotiations After 1989***

After the Velvet Revolution, in the context of newly developing legal systems, restitution began to be made. In post-communist countries this meant the return of nationalized or confiscated property to its rightful owners. While in most cases, restitution was made relatively quickly, the restitution of formerly church-owned properties in Czechia was encumbered by complicated negotiations that continue to the present time. On several occasions, it looked as if ownership rights would finally be successfully resolved and debts from the past would be paid. Each time, however, the sensitivity of the topic, related to the decreasing religiosity of Czechia's inhabitants, resulted in public disagreement with the return of extensive property to churches. The lack of will among political representatives to negotiate the return of said properties is, naturally, tied to the general public's rejection of church restitution.

In connection with the return of church properties to the churches, people tend to use the term property "adjustment" rather than property "settlement." It appears that no matter what form of property return is eventually made, the damages caused by the seizure of church properties will never be completely compensated. This reality is only increased by the absence of any exact database of church properties (that is, no thorough enumeration of their value) and the fact that many properties simply cannot be returned, due to technicalities. Damages to property caused by various natural and human factors or by failure to invest into necessary repairs are not accounted for. Nor is any reckoning made for lost profits from the properties in question or other similar losses. In light of the realities of the situation, it is not possible to ensure a completely objective restitution, due to the fact that many of the properties have undergone irreversible changes. Thus, restitution must be viewed more as a renewal of former ownership rights under existing constitutional and legal conditions (Jäger 2012).

In 1990, the so-called Enumeration<sup>1</sup> Acts (Acts No. 298/1990 Coll. and No. 338/1991 Coll.) were enacted, which resulted in the transfer of certain monastery buildings (altogether, roughly 170 properties). The “blocking paragraph” (Section 29 of Act No. 229/1991 Coll., on the modification of ownership rights to land and other agricultural property) entered into force in 1991, in effect making the transfer of properties owned by a church to other owners impossible. Consequently, the state and its subordinate organizational units, which are responsible for the interim management of the properties in question, are not motivated to properly care for the property, a fact that only serves to increase internal property debt (Czech Ministry of Culture 2008). Between 1996 and 1998, executive mandates (in the form of government resolutions) ensured the return of additional structures used for spiritual, pastoral, social, educational or other similar purposes. This did not include economically managed properties. Over the following years, attempts were made to institute the restitution of church properties through the Enumeration Act. Both the churches as well as state institutions opposed and eventually put a halt to these attempts. The existence of so many outstanding properties awaiting transfer (approximately 100,000) meant a high likelihood of error and overly complicated legal processes (Palas 2004; Večeře 2001). Attempts to work things out through the Enumeration Act continued until 2004. Various forms of settlement were analyzed: the Enumeration Act, a general restitution order, rent, etc. In 2007, a government commission for the settlement of relations between the state and churches and religious communities concluded that it would be best to seek restitution in a combined form, that is, both properties and financial compensation (return property that can be returned and pay a negotiated amount for any remaining properties). The return of the actual properties is a better outcome for monastic orders and congregations, for whom working the land is part of their spiritual traditions. In 2008, the government (executive branch) approved and submitted to the Chamber of Deputies (legislature) a draft for an act on the settlement of property with churches and religious organizations (Government Resolution No. 333, dated 2 April 2008). At the end of the legislative session, this draft had still not been debated. On 1 July 2010 the Constitutional Court issued a decision (Judgment of the Constitutional Court Pl. CC 9/07), proclaiming the Parliament of the Czech Republic’s failure to take action on the issue of the restitution of church properties to be unconstitutional. “The current state of affairs, that is, the absence of a reasonable settlement of historically church-owned property, in which the state – due to its own inactivity – continues to be the dominant source of income for the effected churches and religious communities, furthermore with no apparent connections to the profits accruing from the retained historical church properties, in effect violates Article 16 of Charter 1, in terms of the freedom to express faith within society, through generally public and traditional forms of religiously motivated activities that utilize the historically formulated

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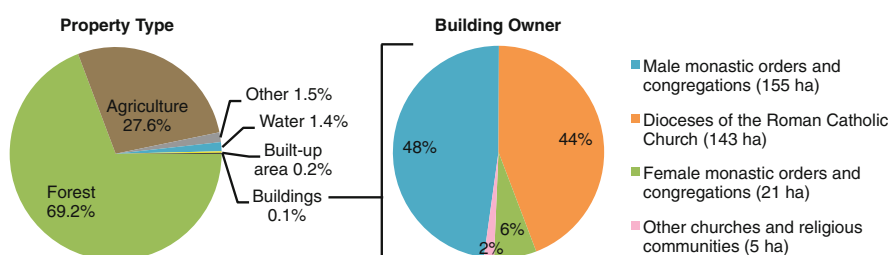
<sup>1</sup>The term “enumeration” indicated that the appendices to the act included an exact list of real estate properties that were subject to transfer.

economic resources in question and, in particular, Article 16 of Charter 2, the economic component of church autonomy” (Jäger 2012).<sup>2</sup>

In response to the court’s decision, the “quickest possible” solution for property settlement was integrated into the government’s program proclamation. In 2011, the Commission defined a new model for property settlement that had been approved by both a church commission and the government. Beginning with this act, negotiations for a new law have been ongoing. The new (proposed) act on the settlement of property with churches includes not only mitigation for wrongs committed by the earlier regime. It also sets forth new property relationships between the state and churches or religious communities. It is, therefore, more than simply a law governing restitution. Instead, the restitution of previously church-owned properties is a condition for the eventual separation of church and state.

### 115.3.2 The Extent of Church Properties

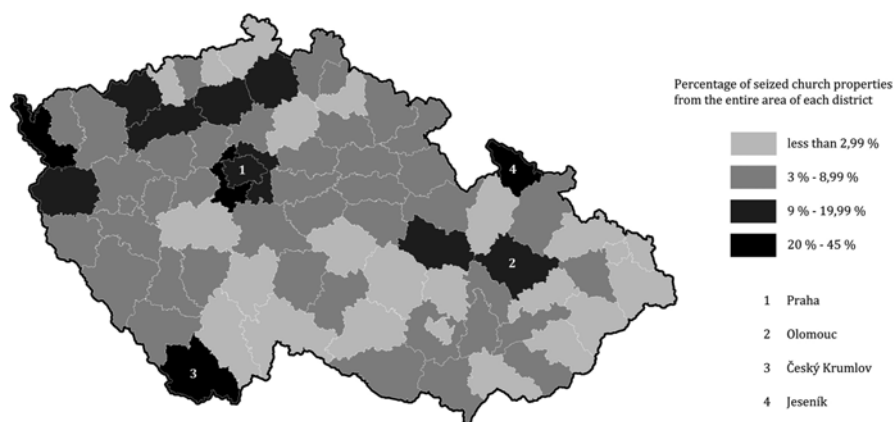
Former church properties are unevenly distributed throughout Czechia, depending on the site and situation of various sacred structures, economic (agricultural) buildings and surrounding properties. In light of the fact that three-fifths of the blocked parcels of land is comprised of forest (Fig. 115.1), one could expect the distribution of these properties to correspond with the spatial distribution of forests in Czechia. The remaining land parcels are currently controlled by the Land Fund of the Czech Republic and their distribution is shown in Fig. 115.2. Figure 115.1 also depicts the extent of buildings, seized from churches, along with the type of original owner. Nearly half of the buildings belong(ed) to dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church.



**Fig. 115.1** Extent of formerly church-owned properties (Source: Martina Hupková, Tomáš Havlíček and Daniel Reeves, data from Government draft of a bill 2012)

<sup>2</sup>“It is also possible to point out that the failure to return (as actual real estate properties) any of a certain group of items from among the historical properties of churches and religious communities would constitute a violation of Article 15 (1), Article 16 (1) and (2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms” (Jäger 2012).





**Fig. 115.2** Seized church properties in the Czech Republic, by district (Map by Martina Hupková, Tomáš Havlíček and Daniel Reeves, data from Land Fund of the Czech Republic [2011](#))

Regional differences in seized church properties (excluding forests) exhibit significant variability at the district level. Higher concentrations of seized church property are dependent, primarily, on the presence of important centers of the Roman Catholic Church (archbishoprics, bishoprics) as well as the presence of important monasteries which, in the past, controlled vast real estate holdings. The highest portions of seized church property from the overall area of districts (more than 9 %) are found in districts next to the archbishoprics of Prague and Olomouc. Above-average values are also found in the Český Krumlov and Jeseník Districts, both of which are home to important monasteries affiliated with extensive tracts of real estate. In contrast, low portions (less than 3 %) of seized church property (primarily agricultural land) are found in regions with a higher concentration of Protestant or non-Catholic inhabitants, particularly in Vysočina, northern Moravia and Silesia (Havlíček and Hupková [2008](#)).

Church property evolved over several centuries. In the fourteenth century, one-third of Czech lands were controlled by the (Catholic) Church. During the fifteenth century, the time of the Hussite reform movement, a large amount of church property was destroyed and land was seized from the Church. This seized property was never returned and the Church acquired new properties from other resources (in part, from taxes on salt). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, as part of the reforms of Emperor Joseph II, a third of Czechia's monasteries were shut down<sup>3</sup>; their properties were placed under the administration of religious funds. Land reforms in the twentieth century had a great impact on church properties. The first land reform (beginning in 1919) included the division of large estates (larger than

<sup>3</sup>Those that were not involved in education, scientific research, healthcare or charity work.

150 ha (370.7 acres) and the reallocation of land to small-scale farmers. This reform did not apply to land owned by the state, the districts or the municipalities; nonetheless, it did apply to church-owned land to the tune of 232,000 ha (more than 537,000 acres). Contributions to clergy salaries, in accordance with Act No. 329/1920 Coll., were provided as compensation for the seized properties. A revision of the first land reform began to be applied in 1948. It called for the confiscation of estates larger than 50 ha (123.6 acres). This reform applied to church property and no form of legally-mandated compensation was ever made for the seized properties. A new land reform, also instigated in 1948, seized all properties larger than 1 ha (2.47 acres), that is, virtually all forest and agricultural lands. This left the churches without any economic resource base and robbed them of any chance at self-sufficiency. Because no compensation had been offered, Act No. 218/1949 Coll. on Financial Provisions by the State for Churches and Religious Societies was prepared and enacted and, from that time forward, the impacted churches have been forced to rely on aid from the state. The acquisition of church properties was carried out, not only through legal means; in some cases, it even resulted from the illegal, forced seizure of property.

In 2007, a church committee submitted a list of all seized church properties to the government (Štícha et al. 2008). As the objective of the settlement is to mitigate the losses caused by the communist regime after 1948, a critical period,<sup>4</sup> from 25 February 1948 to 1 January 1990, was determined. The list was compiled from land registers which, while they do include information about ownership, omit any information on the size of the real estate properties in question. Due to changes in divisions of land parcels, extending over nearly 60 years' time, specifications concerning the size of former church holdings were generated from a comparative assemblage of parcels or extrapolations. In this way, the extent of previously church-owned properties was determined to be 261,000 ha (645,000 acres). The list of properties was audited by an independent counseling firm, compared with data from the current administrators of the properties (state enterprises and institutions) and data from the various nationalized, large estates in the National Archive. Nearly 225,000 ha (556,000 acres) of formerly church-owned property has been documented and, therefore, the list of properties created by the church commission was designated as the starting point for property settlement between the state and the effected churches (Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic 2012).

Only property currently owned by the state – not properties owned by municipalities, regions or private parties – shall be designated for return. Essentially, this means property controlled by the Land Fund of the Czech Republic or the Forests of the Czech Republic. Table 115.1 presents an overview of all the properties that churches claim in the list submitted by the church committee in 2007 along with the total area of formerly church-owned properties presently owned by the state. Forests of the Czech Republic records show an additional 23,128 ha (57,150 acres) of forest land that was previously owned by the Catholic Church. By 25 February

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<sup>4</sup>Only losses that occurred during this time period are to be compensated.

**Table 115.1** Overview of the extent of former church property

Property		Hectares		Perspective
Former church property		261,000	List of properties subject to restitution, according to the list submitted by the church committee in 2007	Church
Former church property currently owned by the state	Land Fund	48,412	Former church property currently administered by the Land Fund of the Czech Republic, according to Land Fund records	State
	Forests of the Czech Republic (Lesy ČR)	151,801	Former church property currently administered by the Forests of the Czech Republic, according to Forest CR records; only 24 ha of which was not previously owned by the Roman Catholic Church	

Source: Ministry of Culture (2008) and Government draft of a bill (2012)

1948, however, this particular land no longer belonged to any church and, as such, restitution does not apply to it.

### 115.3.3 *Parameters of Settlement*

The church committee, working in cooperation with Czechia's Ministry of Culture, completed an assessment of the value of former church-owned property,<sup>5</sup> in 2007. The overall amount<sup>6</sup> was calculated at 134 billion CZK (approx. 6.7 billion USD) and represents the state's financial debt to the churches. While 98 % of the property was taken from the Roman Catholic Church, the drafted bill on property settlement allocates 80 % of the overall amount to the Roman Catholic Church and 20 % to the other churches, in an attempt to encourage the self-sufficient financial management of all churches and religious organizations (Grulich 2012).

The current parameters of settlement come from a government-approved proposal prepared in 2008. In contrast with the proposal described in the preceding paragraph, the most substantial change is in the ratio of actual property returned to the amount of financial restitution provided. In light of the necessity to stabilize the financial management of Czechia, the volume of physical properties to be returned increased. Expressed monetarily, this increase was from 51 to 75 billion CZK (2.55 to 3.75 billion USD). On the other hand, financial restitution decreased from 83 to 59 billion CZK (4.15 to 2.95 billion USD). As the objective of restitution is to enable churches to operate financially independent of the state, economically useful

<sup>5</sup> Based on the average market price of agricultural land.

<sup>6</sup> The amount is the current value of the property that was unlawfully taken from the churches in the past.

property (fields, forests, fish ponds and usable (for example, agricultural) structures) currently administered by state institutions and enterprises – the Land Fund and Forests of the Czech Republic – will be preferentially transferred to the churches. This model is preferred, in part, because of the possibility of quickly transferring property from the Land Fund and Forests of the Czech Republic to churches.

Pastoral property currently owned by the state that is functionally tied to the properties of churches and religious communities shall also be subject to restitution. Additional adjustments to the settlement parameters focus on the payment of the financial settlement, including the time period of the payments (shortened from 60 to 30 years to ensure the quicker separation of church and state), the appreciation of financial amounts and implementation of a transitional period of financing churches (a 17-year period of decreasing church financing before it ceases altogether, which is intended to give churches time to adjust to the new conditions).

Smaller churches will use the newly acquired property and finances to expand and improve their current activities in the knowledge that their financial resources will not suffice for larger projects or investments (Grulich 2012). In general, churches will extend their activities beyond worship, education and healthcare to include social work, youth outreach programs and the prevention of socially pathologic problems in society. Finances will likewise be used to promote and present the religious communities themselves. Larger churches will be able to invest larger sums of money and use assets to co-finance projects from European funds.

#### **115.4 Červená Řečice: An Example of the Effects of the Church Property Block on the Development of a Municipality**

The municipality of Červená Řečice in the Vysočina Region (southeast of Prague, between Prague and Brno) has become a symbol of the negative repercussions of the unresolved property issues between the state and churches, at the municipal level. The municipality, home to roughly 1,000 inhabitants and with an area of 2,646 ha (6,538 acres), can only utilize about 20 % of its land area. More than 80 % of the municipality's land is subject to the block on formerly church-owned property and is, therefore, administered by the Land Fund. As Fig. 115.3 affirms, several of these blocked properties are located in the immediate vicinity of the center of the municipality, severely limiting its territorial development in all directions. It is as if the municipality were locked in a glass cage that limits development, both in terms of construction and infrastructure as well as society. Clearly, the greatest problem is the block of properties within built-up areas of the municipality.

The situation that now exists in Červená Řečice is a reflection of the cultural development of the region itself. The renaissance palace in the center of town served as the summer headquarters of the Prague Archbishop. This is the primary reason for their being such a large concentration of properties near the palace and even its broader surrounding area that belong(ed) to the Catholic Church. However, the unfortunate territorial configuration of blocked land parcels is not the only hindrance to the



**Fig. 115.3** Blocked properties (*white colour*) in the municipality of Červená Řečice (Map by Martina Hupková, Tomáš Havlíček and Daniel Reeves, data from Government draft of a bill [2012](#))

municipality's development. A second cause can be found in the failure to reach a working consensus between the municipality, the Catholic Church and the state. While purchasing or selling blocked former church-owned properties is strictly forbidden, it would be possible to realize certain objectives by alternative means. In practice, so-called three-way agreements do occur between municipalities, churches and the state. If a municipality wishes to create a residential zone on properties administered by the Land Fund or the Authority for Representing the State in Issues of Property, it makes a deal with the rightful former owner (that is, the Catholic Church) that, after a property settlement between the state and the churches (regardless of how it is carried out in the end), said rightful owner shall give the property to the municipality. A similar agreement is also made between the municipality and the state (in the event that the conclusion of property settlement would result in the state owning the property in question). These agreements are concluded as contracts for a future contract. The alternative described above requires the mutual consensus of three sides, each of which is seeking its own interests. Naturally, this is not an easy arrangement. In Červená Řečice, the negotiations described were not successfully completed due to an unclear situation concerning responsibility and the appropriate administering body of the Catholic Church. Červená Řečice is located within the České Budějovice Diocese, but its local palace served as headquarters for the Prague Archbishop. There is an ongoing internal dispute within the church as to which of these institutions (the Prague or České Budějovice Diocese) should be the one to decide in matters of the properties in question. Nonetheless, agreements with the Catholic Church have previously been made in Červená Řečice, concerning the construction of a roadway that transected part of a blocked parcel of land. This situation demonstrates that resolution of various situations is on a case-by-case basis and depends very much on the specific properties in question and on the specific stakeholders that are entitled to decide on the matter.

Not only does the block on church properties result in a stagnation in development, that is, infrastructure and new construction, it also brings into play a series of associated effects which prevent or hinder the natural socio-economic development of a given territory. Because of an inability to build new residential structures, a municipality misses out, in large degree, on the possibility of new residents moving in. According to its mayor, the municipality of Červená Řečice has experienced changes in its demographic structure due to its inability to provide housing for young families with children that could otherwise settle in the town. After 1989, the municipality noted interest from potential new inhabitants, to which it was unable to sufficiently react, in the form of new construction. Yet it failed to meet existing demand. Consequently, the influx of young families with children was limited, which in turn led to increases in the portion of older residents. In connection with the low number of children in the municipality (compared to expected numbers in the presence of normal development), the local elementary school was closed down. Beyond residential construction, the block on church properties has also impacted Červená Řečice in terms of business-related construction which, due to the arrangement of Czechia's system for financing municipalities, can play a significant role. Municipalities receive 30 % of the income taxes of individuals employed or conducting a business, on the basis of their place of residence, and 1.5 % of the statewide earnings from an income tax acquired from individuals from employment or functional benefits, based on the ratio of the number of employees in a given municipality, as of 1 December of the previous year, to the total number of employees in all of Czechia's municipalities (Act No. 243/2000 Coll.). Yet another unfavorable effect of the blocked properties is the inability to receive financial aid from European Union subsidy programs, which require that property ownership be clearly defined. Projects often completed in Czech municipalities with support from the EU include improvements to the heating and insulation of schools and nursery schools, construction of playgrounds in parks or schools (blocked in Vyskytná Municipality), the renovation/modernization of municipal buildings, for example, fire stations or cultural halls (blocked in Vyskytná Municipality), municipal roads, improvements to infrastructure (blocked in Nová Cerekev Municipality). Additional grant-awarding schemes at national and regional levels also require either clearly defined ownership of property or that the property owner must apply directly for any funding.

A block impacting even very small land parcels can cause problems to the implementation of linear transportation or technical infrastructure projects. As stated above, in Červená Řečice, the municipality, the Catholic Church and the state managed to come to an agreement over blocked properties in a location where the municipality intended to construct a municipal road. Czechia's extensive network of cycling paths constitutes another significant linear element of infrastructure development. Technical linear infrastructure, primarily water delivery and sewage systems, is a key ingredient in the potential development of a municipality and is, therefore, an item of interest to mayors. While this problem does not impact Červená Řečice, the municipality has an effective wastewater disposal system in place, it can and does affect municipalities of many sizes, both smaller and larger. On the basis of a directive on water (2000/60/EC), Czechia committed to make improvements in purifying wastewater in municipalities with more than 2,000 inhabitants. By 2012,

and in all smaller municipalities by 2015, this is a significant current issue. According to Czech legislation (Act No. 254/2001), technical norms (CSN 75 6101) and general standards for the construction of wastewater treatment systems, implementation of linear sewer lines coupled with a classical water treatment plant is the most appropriate solution for treating wastewater, even in the smallest municipalities and settlements (Moldan et al. 2011). Failure to reach a consensus in the three-way negotiations, described above, concerning parcels of land designated for sewer line construction can be considered very risky to the communities involved. In the municipality of Sedlec-Prčice, for example, the necessary three-way agreement leading to sewer line construction was only reached after long and complicated negotiations.

This blockage of properties also results in the devastation of the cultural and spiritual values of an effected municipality. Architecturally, culturally and historically valuable buildings, situated on blocked properties, are frequently left to fall into disrepair and eventual ruin. The state which, in the present interim period, controls such properties with their buildings does not have sufficient capability or will (naturally, as it is merely a temporary steward) to invest into such buildings. Further postponement of an eventual solution will lead to irreparable damages to a number of valuable structures and, as such, to the loss of part of the local cultural-historical heritage.

The mayor of Červená Řečice expects to see renewed interest in small scale residential construction in the municipality, after the anticipated settlement between the state and the effected churches is complete (Bečková 2011). Such expectations are in line with general developments occurring in other small municipalities in the hinterland of larger regional centers. At the present time, however, she does not express much hope in new business-related construction nor does she expect such development in the future. The block on church properties, which are tied up in the ongoing settlement negotiations (or lack thereof), has interrupted the continuity of development in Červená Řečice. As to whether natural development has merely been interrupted or if it has been systematically altered to take on a new trajectory, at present, we can only speculate. In the case of Červená Řečice, it seems very unlikely that the municipality will be able to pick up where “natural” development left off in 1989, before the block on church properties took effect. Not only has the territorial development of the municipality been impeded, or temporarily halted, by this process. But it has been fundamentally changed with a direct impact on any future development of the town and its surrounding area. Červená Řečice is actively doing what it can (it has initiated discussions on property settlement with a letter to the president of Czechia as well as through the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic) to bring about a solution – any type of solution – to property ownership issues between the state and the churches.<sup>7</sup> The primary concern for the municipality is that contested properties be no longer blocked and that the new owners of said properties have complete control over them. In other words, one and only one entity will be able to decide on the fate of a given property, making it much easier for the municipality to make arrangements concerning its own current and future development. In connection with this, local leaders have come up

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<sup>7</sup>There is a justifiable assumption that, in the case of certain parcels becoming property of the state, such property would be transferred for free or, at least, under favorable conditions, to the municipality, in which it is located.



with a slogan: “any solution is better than no solution.” At present, Červená Řečice has an approved master plan (a fundamental, long-term development document, prepared by municipalities in Czechia, focused on land-use and zoning for development) in place that designates the blocked properties as developable and indicates possible future uses. In this way, the master plan anticipates settlement of the property issues and plans for the development of a post-restitution municipality.

## 115.5 Property Restitution in Czech Society

The long and drawn out nature of talks concerning the eventual form of property settlement between the state and the churches indicates just how complicated the topic is. Within Czechia’s secularized society, a large majority of the general public is opposed to the idea of returning property to churches and religious societies. According to one church representative (Grulich 2012), 70 % of Czechia’s inhabitants do not agree with the return of church properties to the churches. During the initial, post-communist transition period, efforts were made to implement a systematic settlement of the issue. In light of the political underpinnings of the problem, however, progress towards such systematic settlement has been heavily influenced by the policy of each of the subsequent government coalitions. Grulich (2012) called the property settlement of the churches and the state a “hot political issue.” Is it realistic to expect any government coalition in Czechia to make actually returning property to the churches (not merely declaring good intentions) a priority? In increasingly secularized Czechia, postponement of this already overdue settlement is exacerbated by growing opposition from the public. While the residents of Červená Řečice are likely better informed, as compared to the inhabitants of other municipalities, about the issue of property settlement between the state and the churches – due to the fact that it impacts them directly – they generally do not share the opinion of municipal leaders who want to see any type of settlement implemented (as long as it frees up the blocked properties). Instead, Červená Řečice’s residents tend to share the view of the majority, secularized population, which does not support the full-value return of properties to the churches (Bečková 2011).

As the discussion above implies, property settlement between the state and the effected churches is not a simple issue confined only to the subjects involved. We affirm that the consequences of the as yet unresolved church-state relations manifest themselves in local and regional development. Local self-governing authorities, that is, municipalities, and to a lesser degree regions and private entities are important stakeholders, in that they either use – or would like to use – blocked properties. Their primary interest is to see ownership of the properties resolved in any way that would make it possible for the land to be used or sold. Pressure to resolve this property settlement issue is coming from municipalities, but only from those municipalities impacted by blocked properties. This creates an interesting situation, in which certain municipalities and the churches are allies working to achieve property settlement with the state. The churches can be viewed as passive stakeholders due to the fact that they have never



made an official proposal or request for settlement of the outstanding property issues. Instead, the churches have waited for the state to initiate negotiations. In contrast, impacted municipalities can be designated active stakeholders, which initiate and actively promote actions leading to eventual settlement of the matter. According to Bečková (2011), the mayor of Červená Řečice, the three-way agreements described above actually work against any systematic resolution of the problem, because any instance of a problem-free, three-way agreement – municipality-church-state – results in less pressure from municipalities to expedite property settlement. This indicates that, from a long-term perspective, three-way agreements are not in the best interest of stakeholders seeking property settlement.

We frequently use the term “churches” in this chapter to describe all the churches and religious societies involved in property settlement in Czechia. The churches speak together and negotiate collectively through a church committee, established for the sole purpose of negotiating the ultimate settlement of disputed properties with the state. According to Grulich (2012), leader of an ecumenical group in Czechia, the opinions and attitudes of all the effected religious societies are united and cooperation and communication within the committee are problem-free. Consequently, we can consider the “churches” to be an internally cohesive unit, seeking one common goal. This is a remarkable feat in and of itself, considering the differences among the various churches. Because the state determined the financial amount to be paid out to the churches, the church committee needed only to finalize the rates by which the amount would be divided (Table 115.2). An agreement was met without any significant disputes. The various individual churches were cordial

**Table 115.2** Division of the lump-sum financial restitution among churches and religious societies after 30 years

Church	Sum
Roman Catholic Church	47,200,000,000
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	3,085,312,000
Evangelic Church of Czech Brethren	2,266,593,186
Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands	1,146,511,242
Apostolic Church	1,056,336,374
Brethren Evangelical Free Church	761,051,303
Silesian Evangelical Lutheran Church	654,093,059
Moravian Church	601,707,065
Seventh-day Adventist Church	520,827,586
United Methodist Church	367,634,208
Greek Catholic Church	298,933,257
Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic	272,739,910
Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic	272,064,153
Czech Baptist Union	227,862,069
Evangelic Church Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic	118,506,407
Lutheran Evangelical Church – Augsburg Confession	113,828,334
Religious Society of Czech Unitarians	35,999,847

Source: Government draft of a bill (2012)

and, in the end, the initial amount was divided according to a number of criteria, the two most important of which are the number of clergy and the number of adherents recorded in the Czech Population and Housing Census.

In terms of the issue at hand, the state should be understood to mean both legislative and executive powers, that is, parliament and the ruling government coalition. This power is obligated with both the fulfillment of generally social-moral commitments of a state (that is, implementing restitution for the wrongs of the former regime) as well as with responsibilities towards citizens/the voters and their public opinion. Considering public disagreement with the return of church properties, it is clear not only that a conflict exists, but that it is the primary cause for the long period of inactivity, on the part of the state, regarding the settlement of church properties. There is a confirmed connection between the rising secularization of Czech society and the tendency to object to the restitution of church property, which can be viewed as a consequence of political inactivity in implementing (not merely in declaring) a settlement of former church estates.

Internet discussions on the topic<sup>8</sup> enable us to tease out the primary reasons behind the public's negative attitude regarding the return of properties to the churches. The first subset of reasons arises out of Czech society's generally negative relationship towards churches (church institutions) and results in an aversion towards the return of church properties to churches and, in particular, to the implementation of any type of financial restitution, in light of the state's unfavorable economic situation. The second group of reasons results from ignorance or superficial knowledge concerning the issue. For instance, many people express the conviction that ownership (acquisition) of the properties in question was unauthorized to begin with. Such convictions are usually based on one of two faulty conclusions: (a) that church property equals state property and, consequently, nothing needs to be returned or (b) that after returning property to churches, it shall be owned/controlled by a given church, as a whole, and not by its local divisions (that is, the Roman Catholic Church with headquarters in the Vatican as opposed to a local parish or diocese). In the process, a discussion concerning the legitimacy of church ownership has become a significant component of property settlement. Four expert opinions have been prepared (Hrdina and Kindl 2007; Mikule and Kindl 1998; Šimáčková 2007; Zachariáš 2007). They show that former (as of 1948) church-owned properties were owned by the churches, at least, in the sense of the present-day term "ownership." The expert opinions also agree that the rightful subjects, to whom properties should be returned are the various individual parishes, parish beneficia, chapters and foundations, but not the larger church organizations.

It is interesting to note how developments on the topic of property restitution are closely followed by the media and through the media by the majority of population, at least, as long as "something interesting is happening" (for example, a new settlement proposal is brought forward). Most of the time, however, property

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<sup>8</sup>Discussions with Pavla Bendová, director of the Churches Division in the Ministry of Culture, are particularly interesting as is the first reading of negotiations on the drafted legislation for an act on property settlement with churches and religious societies in the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament.

settlement between the state and the churches, along with its impacts on regional development, remains outside of the interest of mainstream media and, consequently, outside of the public interest as well. This is the situation in spite of the fact that it is one of the more significant processes taking place as part of the post-totalitarian transformation of Czech society that its position is considered a visible indicator of Czechia's ability to come to terms with its own past. Resolving this sticky situation is only becoming more complicated with the passage of time, particularly considering the spiritual development of Czech society.

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# Children's perceptions of local religious sites in rural Central Europe

Local territorial identities are an important facet of community life. Humans tend to acquire a sense of belonging and pride from familiar surroundings and familiar faces. Among other things, people often recognize visual elements of the local landscape as symbols of their community. Such symbols could be physical landforms – mountains or interesting rock formations – or prominent man-made structures – buildings or infrastructure.

Religious structures, in particular, can be a culturally significant element of the landscapes that contribute to local territorial identities. Religion has long been an important dimension of Central Europe's cultural traditions. And while its role and overall significance appears to be shifting due to broad societal changes (Wilford 2010), religion continues to serve as a component of local, regional and even national identities (Reeves 2015).

This study focuses on the importance that young people ascribe to religious sites in their own community. We explore two model regions and compare similar, rural towns on both sides of the borders between Czechia and Poland and between Slovakia and Poland. Relying on cognitive maps drawn by students in the fourth and eighth grade levels, we determine whether religious structures appear in the children's maps and what relative importance is attributed to such structures. Student created maps enable us to explore the degree to which international borders and cultural differences among Czech, Polish and Slovak societies are reflected in the children's perceptions.

We chose to focus this study of local religious identity on young people for two reasons. The first was accessibility. Through schools it is possible to access and conduct research with groups of children that fairly accurately represent the communities in which the schools are located. The second was our desire to view local communities through the minds of their inheritors – the rising generation. Children seem to be less conditioned or inhibited by social norms. Their responses provide clearer insights into present conditions as well as the immediate future of local identities for the communities studied.

We seek to answer the following questions concerning religious sites in local communities.

- Do traditionally important religious sites have meaning for today's children?

- ⑥ Do perceptions of religious sites differ noticeably among children living in different model areas and on different sides of international borders?

## The role of post-secularism and religious identity in the perception of sacred sites

A number of recent studies focus on religious affiliation but fail to explore other dimensions of religiosity and religious identity. Post-secular society has experienced a transformation of religious identity accompanied by a general increase in the significance of religion and religious identities (Hammond 1988, King 2003). People are now more likely to declare their faith and religious organizations have become an integral part of the public square as well as its emerging virtual and digital spaces. Furthermore, religion continues to play a significant role in the lives of many individuals, with religious services still accompanying important life transitions. Religion has acquired more influence in the daily lives of its practitioners and impacts their spatial behaviour, decision making, and their motivations (Klingorová 2016). Because religion now enjoys a greater amount of respect than it did just a few years ago in more strictly secular societies, believers find it easier to express their identity in public. This is sometimes described as a greater institutionalisation of religious life (Wilford 2010). Post-secularism also transforms the various forms in which religious identity depends on secular public institutions and alters its relationship with the democratic public sphere.

The religious landscapes of Europe, as a whole, and of Czechia, Poland and Slovakia have become significantly more diverse (Havlíček 2014) due to immigration, the decline of traditional churches and the growth of smaller, predominantly Christian communities and new religious movements. The presence of new religious communities can be seen in the emergence of new, often visually distinct, places of worship which transform urban space. Large cities tend to be more secularised and their religions more diversified than rural areas (due to a more liberal atmosphere, rationalisation, less social control, more options for leisure activities, more personal approaches to spirituality; Chromý, Jančák, Marada, Havlíček 2011, Potančoková, Berghammer 2015). Moreover, the religious landscape of Czechia, Slovakia and Poland is in many ways unique, at least in a European context. The religious dimension of this region's landscapes and societies has been significantly altered by communist regimes which sought to remove religious expression from public life. After 1989, religion has regained significance within Czech, Slovak, and Polish societies. This resurgence has been accompanied increased heterogeneity (Havlíček, Klingorová 2017;



Havlíček, Hupková 2008; Havlíček, Hupková, Smržová 2009). Along with the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, these three countries experienced a revival of religious life (Henkel 2014), which has found expressions in the religious landscape (not only) through the emergence of new sacral structures (Havlíček, Klingorová 2017, Havlíček, Hupková 2013).

Despite noticeable influences from Christian culture and tradition, Czech society remains predominantly secular. Comparative international studies help to illustrate this point. Special Eurobarometer 225, compiled by the European Union in 2005, posed the question: “Which of the following statements comes closest to your beliefs?” While 80% of those questioned in Poland selected the statement “I believe there is a God,” only 19% of Czech respondents and 61% of Slovak respondents professed a belief in God. A more recent study, the Global Religious Landscape (Pew Research Center 2012), published a measure of people unaffiliated with any religion for the three countries in this study. Czechia was quite high in this measure at 76% (Hamplová (2013) describes an even higher percentage – 79.3 – claiming no affiliation to institutionalized religion). In contrast, 14% of Slovak respondents and a mere 6% of Polish participants claimed no religious affiliation. Czechia does however contain regions – primarily rural areas – where the percentage of Christians (Catholics, Protestants) remains high (Havlíček, Hupková 2008). Similarly, rural areas in Poland and Slovakia tend to show greater affinity for traditional Christianity.

These vast differences at the country level are likely indicative of significant regional differentiation in religious landscapes and the way that such landscapes are experienced and perceived. These possible differences along with curiosity regarding the aforementioned aspects of post-secularism led us to conduct research into young people’s perceptions in rural border regions of Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.

## Methods

It is difficult to ascertain how people really feel about their everyday surroundings and any attempt to measure such feelings and impressions presents additional uncertainties. In such a situation, it is best for researchers to proceed with a carefully defined method and then allow the method to shed what light it can on the research questions. Drawing on other studies using cognitive maps (Ellard, 2015), we developed a method that can be effectively used to gather information on the places that people consider important in a locality they are familiar with. This method can be used to explore a wide variety of topical interests and

various subsets of communities. In this case, the method focuses on children's views of religious structures in carefully selected towns.

To gather information on children's perceptions of their hometowns, we visited elementary schools and collected cognitive maps from fourth and eighth grade children. Initially, we had intended to use age as a different avenue for comparing results. However, due to limitations in the responses collected, age-based comparison is not feasible with this particular study.

We gave each student a blank sheet of white paper. Next, we – or the classroom teacher – gave students the following instructions.

1. Draw a map of your hometown that shows places that are important to you.
2. After your map is drawn, add numbers next to your important places. Place a number one by the most important, two for the second most important, etc.
3. Label your important places, either directly on the map or in a numbered list. Tell what the place is and why it is important to you.

Beyond the prepared instructions, a researcher or teacher must not give more information or examples, to minimize any influence – even unintentional influence – that additional examples could provide. This can be difficult, particularly with young children, but there is great value in being consistent and impartial. In the elementary school setting, we found it very helpful to talk with the teacher beforehand to explain the instructions and the need to avoid providing examples or otherwise directing students' thoughts and preferences.

We discovered several instances where students that sat next to or near one another produced remarkably similar maps. It was apparent that one or both students took inspiration from their neighbor's map. We did not design the study in a way to effectively avoid this. We did consistently encourage students to submit their own work, reminding them that there were no wrong ways to create their own maps.

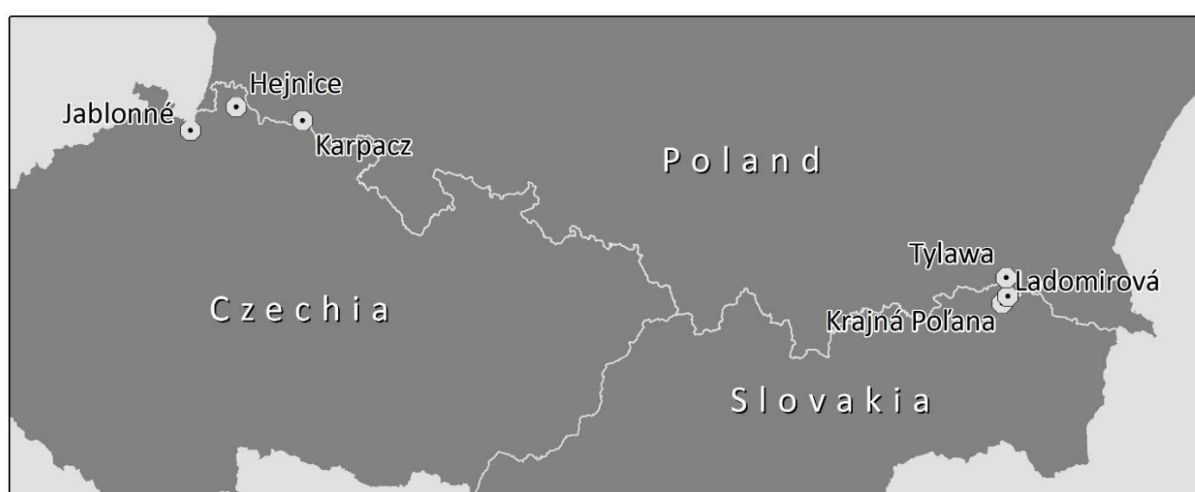
### [Selection of study sites](#)

This study focuses on six communities in two distinct model areas as depicted in Figure 2. As the intent of the study is to explore perceptions regarding religious sites and to make cross-border comparisons of these perceptions, the defined model areas and selected communities had to match certain criteria. Within the model areas, we sought out

communities that were similar in population and that were geographically proximate, but which represented opposite sides of an international border. Moreover, we intentionally picked settlements that were home to significant religious sites.

The first area includes three towns – two Czech and one Polish – in the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion, a recognized region for cross-border cooperation among Czechia, Germany and Poland. The towns have similar populations (see Table 1 below) and each has a regionally significant religious site. We refer to this model area as Karpacz, the name of the largest of the three towns.

Ladomírová has the largest population of the second model area and thereby earns the distinction of being its namesake. This area includes two villages from eastern Slovakia and a third from across the border in Poland. Churches found in the Slovak villages are part of a UNESCO heritage site describing old wooden churches that have been carefully preserved. The nearby Polish village of Tylawa is similar in size and has its own prominent Catholic church. In comparison to the Karpacz area, Ladomírová has much smaller populations and is significantly farther to the East.



*Figure 1: Location of communities included in the study*

The small and rural nature of the towns we conducted research in created some difficulties. We were limited in where we could conduct research by the presence or absence of elementary schools. Yet, even the presence of a school was not an assurance that it would include both fourth and eighth grade classes. Ladomírová only has grades one through five in its school while the school we visited in Tylawa only has higher elementary grades. As in other rural areas, many students commute to the selected elementary schools from the

surrounding area. Some student maps do not describe the target community, as we had envisioned it, but instead portray a different nearby settlement.

In the end, we decided to use all the maps we received from the six elementary schools, regardless of whether they depicted one of the selected communities or another village that happens to send students to the same school. From what we could ascertain, these additional villages include their own religious structures and the students had similar choices about what to include or exclude from their maps.

### Determining a score

To compare the various communities with one another, we developed a score that accounts for all religious sites depicted on student maps and includes multipliers for any religious sites ranked in the top three “most important” places. The score includes two simple counts, one describing all maps that depict a religious structure and one describing all maps that rank a religious structure – with any number – as an *important* place. All maps that have a religious structure labelled as the number one *important* place are counted and multiplied by three. Maps ranking a religious structure at number two are counted and multiplied by two, while those ranking a religious structure with number three are counted and multiplied by one. These various counts and multipliers are added together for a given town and then divided by the total number of maps collected in that town. Expressed as a formula the score looks like this:

$$\text{SCORE} = \frac{\text{maps depicting RS} + \text{maps ranking RS} + (3 * \text{no. of 1}^{\text{st}} \text{ rankings}) + (2 * \text{no. of 2}^{\text{nd}} \text{ rankings}) + \text{no. of 3}^{\text{rd}} \text{ rankings}}{\text{Total maps in group}}$$

The score is set up in such a way as to account for maps that depict religious structures without ranking them as important as well as maps with any ranking assigned to religious structures, regardless of whether this ranking is within the top three. Maps with religious structures ranked among the top three *important* places are counted and multiplied again to reflect the added significance that their creators have attributed to a religious site.

The same maps can be counted multiple times in the formula. For example, a map in which a religious structure is ranked with number one as an *important* place will be counted three different times – once as a map depicting a religious structure, once as a map ranking a religious structure and once as a map ranking a religious structure with number one – with the last of these being multiplied by three. Such a map would receive a score of five points that could then be averaged with others to describe a population sample.

We had a few cases, in which the same map had multiple religious structures ranked among the top three *important* places. These maps were only counted once in the depicting and ranking counts, but they did receive additional points in multipliers for first, second or third rankings. In theory, a single map could bring as many as eight points into the calculation of a group average score. The highest we observed was six points from a single map (religious structures ranked first and third).

The research described herein faces a number of imperfections. The populations and their representative samples are not equivalent; in some cases, they are not even close. The towns and villages differ from one another, as do their respective religious sites. The instructions were not always delivered in precisely the same way and students did not always work independently to complete their own cognitive maps. In spite of all this, we are pleased with the outcome and feel that the resulting student maps provide many insights into children's perceptions of their local landscapes.

## Findings

Table 1 shows the six communities that were included in the study, two each from Czechia, Poland and Slovakia. The table depicts the division into the model areas of Karpacz and Ladamírová. It also describes the population – from the 2011 census, the number of maps we collected and analyzed (sample size), and the average score for each community.

*Table 1: Comparison of the six studied communities*

model area	country	municipality/village	population	sample size	score
<i>Karpacz</i>	<i>Czechia</i>	Hejnice	2696	68	1.059
		Jablonné v Podještědí	3754	63	0.556
	<i>Poland</i>	Karpacz	4999	30	1.6
<i>Ladamírová</i>	<i>Slovakia</i>	Tylawa	380	15	1.667
		Krajná Poľana	213	22	2.955
		Ladamírová	991	10	3

Source: All populations are from the respective 2011 national censuses, with the exception of Tylawa, whose population is an official number from 2006

Data on the populations of the six communities shed light on how the two model areas differ from one another. The three communities in the Karpacz group have populations in the thousands and are officially classified as towns. Krajná Poľana and Ladamírová are the

primary population centers of their respective municipalities (they are not towns), while Tylawa is merely a village within the larger Dukla municipality. The three villages are quite small, particularly Tylawa and Krajná Poľana.

Sample sizes for the various communities differ substantially. As mentioned above, the school we visited in Tylawa did not have fourth grade students, while Lodomírová's elementary school has fourth grade but not eighth grade. The study would have benefitted from greater attention to the availability of students in the desired grade levels and stricter expectations concerning sample size.

All communities in the Karpacz group show lower scores than those in the Lodomírová group. The larger populations in the Karpacz area help to explain this, as there is simply a greater variety of things that could be included in student maps and labelled as important. We discuss this in greater detail below (see Table 2).

Considering the larger region of Central Europe, there is a general trend of increasing religiosity from west to east (Tomka, 2005). This also aids in explaining the higher scores found in the populations in the Lodomírová group as they are located significantly farther east (see Figure 1). However, the very small difference between the scores for the two Polish communities, despite the geographical distance that separates them, seems to go against the notion of a west-east gradient.

In terms of comparing the three national societies, both scores from Slovakia are higher than the scores from Poland, which in turn are higher than those in Czechia (see Table 1). Slovak children appear more inclined to declare the importance of religious sites in their own community than those in Poland or Czechia, while the Czech children appear quite secular in comparison. These findings are in line with other recent studies of territorial identities in this area, in which Slovakia showed the highest level of religious identity followed by Poland and then by Czechia (Reeves, 2015).

To further understand patterns in the ways children viewed their own community and the types of places important to them, we examined the top six important places from each map and placed these into categories. Not surprisingly, "my own home" was the most frequent category, appearing on almost every map. Other popular categories include friends' or relatives' home, recreation (parks, playgrounds) and natural landmarks. Table 2 shows how many maps from each population show a religious site labelled as the first, second or third most important place. In contrast, it also has a count of commercial, public and cultural

sites ranked in any of the top three spots. This count includes several more narrowly defined categories: public services (police stations, post offices, municipal offices), retail, cultural (movie theaters, pubs) and some recreational opportunities – i.e. not parks and playgrounds, but ski slopes, gyms and swimming pools. All of these counts are shown both as raw numbers from the various community samples as well as normalized ratios (number / sample size) that are comparable across the six communities.

The Karpacz group has higher ratios for the commercial, public and cultural sites and, apart from Karpacz's second and third rankings, much lower ratios for religious sites. This information corroborates the idea that the larger towns of the Karpacz model area provide a wider variety of places for children to select as their important places. The villages of the Ladamírová group tend to have much higher ratios in the religious site rankings.

With its row of totals at the bottom, Table 2 presents an opportunity to make comparisons against the entire collection of maps from these six communities. Ratios from any of the six communities can be easily compared with the overall ratio. It is clear from this data, for example, that Karpacz is above average in terms of maps ranking a religious site as second or third most important. The overall numbers show that maps ranking a religious site in the third most important slot (23) are slightly more common than those awarding a second rank (20), while religious sites depicted as the most important place are quite rare (11 from 208 total maps).

*Table 2: Details of high-ranking religious sites and commercial, public and cultural sites by community*

	Religious Sites						Commercial, Public and Cultural Sites	
	1 <sup>st</sup> rankings		2 <sup>nd</sup> rankings		3 <sup>rd</sup> rankings			
	no.	ratio	no.	ratio	no.	ratio	no.	ratio
Hejnice	3	0.044	2	0.029	5	0.074	55	0.809
Jablonné v Podještědí	1	0.016	3	0.048	1	0.016	32	0.508
Karpacz	1	0.033	3	0.1	6	0.2	27	0.9
Tylawa	0	0	4	0.267	0	0	5	0.333
Krajná Pořana	3	0.136	6	0.273	9	0.409	9	0.409
Ladomírová	3	0.3	2	0.2	2	0.2	5	0.5
<i>totals</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>0.053</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>0.096</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>0.111</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>0.639</i>

Source: Authors' calculations.



## Qualitative findings

Cognitive maps collected in this way have great potential for qualitative research. Many inferences can be made from the way things are depicted and arranged on a map that is drawn by a research participant on a blank piece of paper.



Figure 2: Fourth-grade student in Hejnice

Translation: 1. můj domov – my home, 2. škola – school, 3. kostel – church, 4. babička – grandmother, 5. les – forest. List in the lower right: 1. It is my home. 2. It is my school. 3. It is our church. 4. It is my grandmother's home. 5. It is the forest.

This first map, from a fourth-grade student in Hejnice and presented as Figure 2, seems to place important things closer to the middle. “My home” [můj domov] is drawn near the center with great detail. The church [kostel] is also near the center of the map and labelled as the third most important place, behind home and school. We were impressed with the detail that many students used to depict the sacral landscapes that we were interested in seeing in their maps. The Kostel Navštívení Panny Marie [Church of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary] in Hejnice has three towers and three doors as depicted in Figure 2. The colored half circle and the faintly drawn character above the center doors depict a recessed



statue of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus. Figure 3 provides an actual photograph of this church for comparison.

The two distinct age groups involved in this study presented some interesting overall differences. It seems that fourth-grade students, in general, are not yet accustomed to the spatial organizations commonly present in published maps. They had a more difficult time arranging things spatially or depicting places and items to scale. Maps from eighth-grade students often looked much more like a traditional map, including street networks and a notion of scale (see Figure 4).



Figure 3 Church of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary in Hejnice

Figure 4 presents a map from an eighth-grade student in Karpacz. This map includes a street network and a number of different types of



Figure 4: Eighth-grade student from Karpacz

Translation: I. skocznia – ski jump, II. Jamnik – name for a store, III. szkola – school, IV. Orlik – sports field(?), V. Park. Text to the right of numbered list: Places important for me are those where I enjoy meeting with friends.

pathways. These appear to be sidewalks and stairways. Although this map's author has not marked a religious site as one of her/his important places, a church is depicted on the map – in the lower left with a cross on its triangular shaped steeple.

The next example of a map, Figure 5, is from an eighth-grade student in Krajná Poľana. This particular map, however, does not depict Krajná Poľana, but rather the nearby village of Hunkovce. The student demonstrates careful attention to detail in both the wooden church and the German cemetery, two elements of the village's sacral landscape. The actual wooden church in Hunkovce, *Chrám Ochrany Presvätej Bohorodičky* [Church of the Protection of the Mother of God], has an exterior that is divided into three distinct sections just as it is on this map. The German cemetery is the burial place for many German soldiers that lost their lives in the Battle of Dukla Pass in 1944. The tombstones all have a cross shape. The cemetery also contains a large cross monument and an abundance of rock masonry. These various elements are apparent in Figure 5.

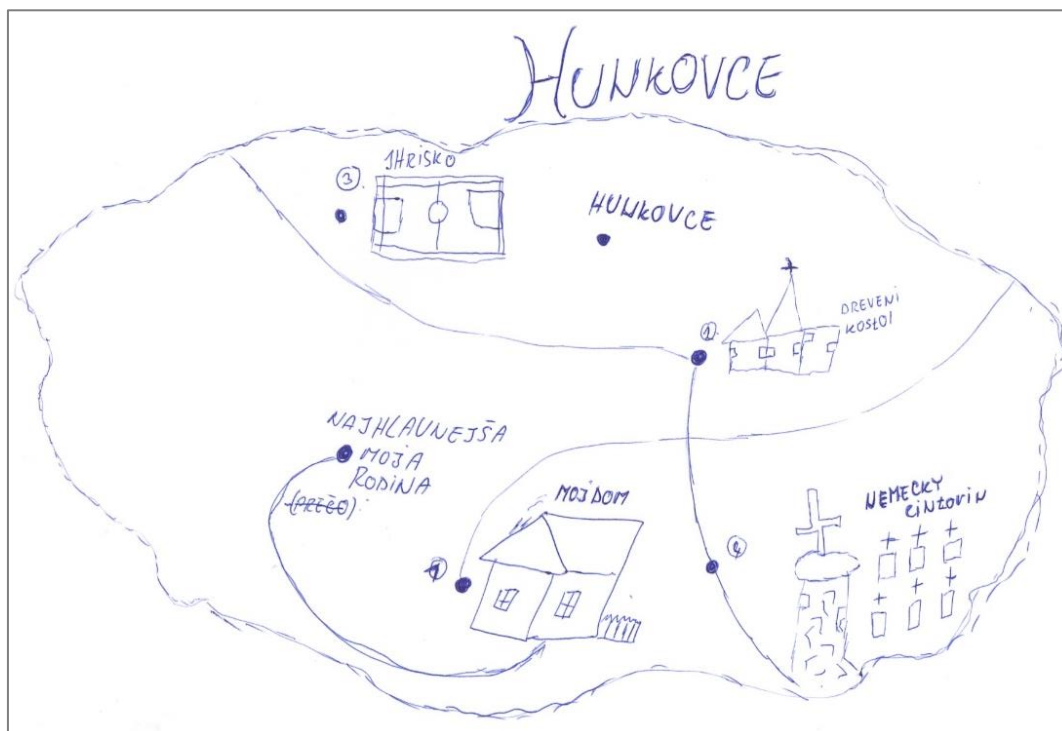


Figure 5: Eighth-grade student in Krajná Poľana (note: student resides in Hunkovce, a nearby village)

Translation: 1. moj dom – my house, 2. Dreveni kostol – wooden church, 3. Ihrisko – playing field, 4. Nemecky cintorin – German cemetery. Additional text: Najhlavnejša moja rodina – most important is my family.



Figure 6: Eighth-grade student from Tylawa

Translation: draga – roadway, kościół – church, domy – houses, las – forest, plot – fence, mostek – bridge, szkoła – school

Some participants in the study expended more effort to explain why places depicted on their maps were important to them. The map shown in Figure 6, for example, from a student in Tylawa, had detailed statements describing the significance of each of the numbered sites. Next to number two it reads, “The church, because I go there on Sunday with my family to pray.” The combination of a visual depiction of the church, drawn from memory, that depicts details of its architecture and a statement explaining the student’s practice of regularly going to the church to pray make a powerful statement concerning this sacral landscape in the eyes of one beholder.

The final map that we include – Figure 7 – is from a fourth-grade student in Lodomírová. It shows more of the landscape-oriented scenery that typifies the fourth-grade maps. The student’s three important places are, in order of importance, the church, home and nature. This map looks quite impressive in colour, with its flowers, butterflies, mushrooms and fruit trees. The church in Lodomírová, *Chrám svätého Michala* [Church of St. Michael the Archangel], has a large and distinct bell tower that stands as a separate structure next to the

actual church building. This explains the dual structure near the label *kostol* [church] and yet again demonstrates the significance of sacral landscapes to children within the respective local communities.



Figure 7: Fourth-grade student from Ladomírová

Translation: kostol – church, dom – house, priroda – nature

## Conclusion

We structured this research study around two questions that we can now answer. First, do traditionally important religious sites have meaning for today's children? Yes, the inclusion of traditional religious sites on many of observed maps, even without being labelled as important, demonstrates the meaning that these sites have for children in a post-secular age. This particular study focuses on rural areas where the impacts of secularism and post-secularism are less evident. Using the same methods to research children's perceptions in urban areas of Central Europe would be an excellent follow-up to this research.

The second research question: Do perceptions of religious sites differ noticeably among children living in different model areas and on different sides of international borders? The study provides evidence to say that yes, perceptions of local religious sites are different



both in the two distinct model areas and in the three countries of the study. Slovak communities showed the highest affinity for their religious sites, followed by Poland and then Czechia. We should point out here the potential fallacy in comparing these results directly to one another. Every village and town is unique in myriad ways, as are the children that inhabit said villages and towns. So, while comparing the results for similar-sized towns within proximate areas is insightful, it should not be interpreted in the same way as hard scientific data.

The methods used in this study have great potential for a wide variety of additional studies. This research focused on children's perceptions of religious sites. Any number of topics beyond religion could be examined in much the same way; retail centers, recreational opportunities or natural landmarks, to name a few. Different age groups or other segments of a population could also be targeted and/or compared one with another.

After viewing several of these student-created cognitive maps, it becomes clear that they are communicating a great deal of information regarding local territorial identity. Accurate portrayals of unique details of local sacral landscapes demonstrate that children are, in many cases, utilizing religious sites as building blocks of their own community identity. In addition, numerically ordered indications of the importance of specific locations depicted on their maps provide children another avenue to express preferences and describe their own hometown. Many children singled out churches and cemeteries as important places within their hometowns.

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